

Arizona Black Mesa Mining Camp Ragged Dime

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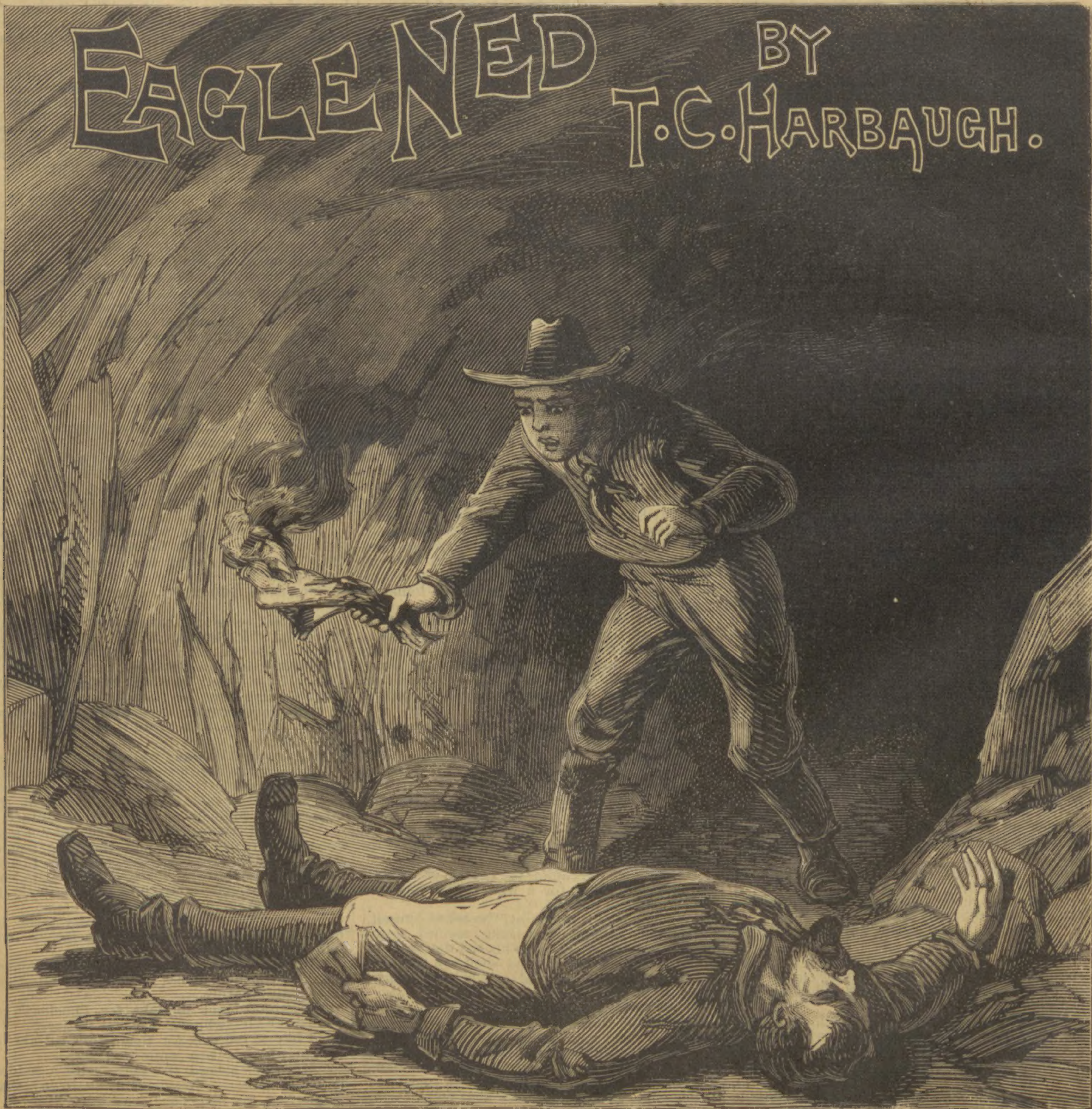
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THE NEXT MOMENT EAGLE NED MADE ANOTHER STARTLING DISCOVERY: THE MAN'S LEFT HAND CLUTCHED A PIECE OF PAPER.



# Eagle Ned

## THE BOY ON GUARD;

OR,

### The Camp Spiders of Ragged Robin.

A Romance of the Black Mesa.

BY T. C. HARBAUGH,

AUTHOR OF "BUCKSKIN DETECTIVE," "PHIL FLASH," "BOY SHADOW," "WIDE-AWAKE LEM," "DAISY DELL," "DODGER DICK" NOVELS, ETC., ETC., ETC.

#### CHAPTER I.

##### THE MYSTERY OF THE TUNNEL.

"SEEMS ter me he's a little queer hyer," and the speaker known as Lazarus touched his forehead significantly and smiled.

"He never says much, that's a fact, an' mebbe Lazarus is right, after all. What ever set him down in Ragged Robin Heaven only knows. He's no good wherever he is, I guess."

This was the opinion of the tough crowd congregated in the one bar-room of the mining-camp situated in the heart of the famous Black Mesa in the center of Arizona.

The subject of these remarks was a boy who had just left the place—a lad of perhaps seventeen, with a fine physique and a clear face which was framed with masses of dark hair almost as silken as the locks of a maiden.

He was known as Eagle Ned, and had been for some time a resident of the camp. No one seemed to know from whence he had come, and it was believed that he was "out of his head" as the roughs of the camp expressed it—which meant that the boy was crazy.

"So long as he hurts no one we'll let him stay," continued the first speaker, a tall, dark-faced man with a bad eye who was called Lazarus, because he always said he was broke, though he had been seen to play long at the gaming-table which ran through the whole night at Ragged Robin.

Eagle Ned had found a home with a good-hearted miner who lived on the outskirts of the camp, and with whom he got along very well.

When he left the bar-room he sauntered toward the cabin where he "bunked," and seemed to be talking to himself as if there was something serious on his mind—the mind the toughs said was "shaky."

Phocion, the miner with whom Ned tarried, was not in and the boy closed the door and sat down.

"I guess I will never find her," he muttered. "Here I have been scouring the camps of Arizona for months but seem to be as far from success as ever. Everything is against me. Perhaps I ought to give up and try to lay up something for a rainy day. But, I can't get her out of my head; no, I can't dismiss the fact that I once had a sister and that she is lost. If it wasn't for that I would go back, or to the new West and try to make a raise."

He would have continued muttering or pondering if the door had not opened at that moment and he beheld a man before him.

It was not his friend Phocion but another tenant of the camp and well-known to every one in it. Yes, everybody knew "The Count," as he was called—a large man with waxed mustaches, a dark, Mexicanish skin and little eyes that looked as dangerous as those of a panther. He was the main man of the camp, owned more "locates" than any other, and was as rich as men generally get who mine and gamble among the mountains of the wild Southwest.

Eagle Ned eyed The Count sharply and his look was returned, with interest.

"I say, boy, how would you like to do me a favor?" demanded the man.

"I'm always ready to help any one. What is it you want done?"

"It's a little dangerous, in a certain sense," returned The Count. "I want some one to creep down through the Devil's Tunnel and see if there is a ghost at the end of it."

Now, Eagle Ned could not help smiling at this. He knew something about the Devil's Tunnel, a long, dark, mysterious corridor in the main mine owned by The Count, whose other name was said to be Jack Jargo. Men who live wild, tough lives are more or less superstitious, and it was believed that at the end of the Devil's Tunnel lurked a ghost which was said to be the

spirit of an old Spanish monk walled up by the Indians when they rebelled against Spanish rule in the Southwest and thus closed some of the richest mines in the world.

"Are you afraid?" asked Jack.

"I guess not," was answered; and Ned arose and put on the coat he had thrown aside.

"When do you want me to go?"

"Now. It is night and no one will see us go down to the mine."

"Come along, then."

Somewhat surprised at the alacrity shown by the youth, The Count led the way from the shanty and in a moment they were on their way to the shaft.

"It's a pretty long crawl," explained Jack, as if to give the boy a chance to back out, if he wished.

"I'll do my best to get to the end of it," was the assurance.

"You don't believe in spooks, then?"

Ned turned and looked into the miner's face. He thought he caught a vanishing eagerness in the little eyes, but he did not seem to note it.

"I was never taught that ghosts harmed any one," he said. "Therefore, I can't say that I believe in such things."

They went on until the mine shaft was reached and five minutes later Eagle Ned and Jack stood at the bottom of it.

"The boys thought it best to shut the tunnel up," explained the owner, as he turned his light upon the tunnel whose mouth was seen to be stopped with bowlders. "They never go into it themselves and they don't think that I would like to investigate."

The sinewy hands of The Count rolled the stones from the mouth of the tunnel and Eagle Ned stooped and tried to look down the dark way. But his keen eyes refused to show him anything.

"No ghosts yet, Jack," he observed, soberly. "I'll investigate."

"All right; go in now and see how long the infernal tunnel is, and what is at the end of it; then return and report."

The boy did so. He crawled into the tunnel, which was nearly high enough to let him stand erect and looking back he saw that Jack and his torch had vanished.

Ned was well provided with long stick matches, and striking one, he sounded the walls and kept on.

On, on he went, the close, fetid air almost sickening him.

All at once he stopped and thought.

"What if I am that man's victim?" passed through his mind. "What if he brought me to this place to bury me here? They don't like me, I know they don't; I am tramping around too much, and always with my eyes open. I heard them talking about me this very night down at Black Burt's, and very well understand that they would like to have me out of the camp. I have seen some very strange things since coming to Ragged Robin, and they don't want me to find out too much, that is evident, so I must be on guard, all the time—never be found off guard."

He went on again, however, finding that the tunnel had turned and no longer was running straight into the huge hill. He could touch the sides with outstretched hands, but the stones shed an almost icy moisture, and altogether the Devil's Tunnel was about as dismal a place as one could imagine.

There came a time when his matches would not burn. When he struck one it went out immediately, as if some ghostly hand had smothered it. He knew it was the foul, mephitic air in the tunnel, and shutting his lips hard, resolved to go a little further and then make his way back.

At last Eagle Ned found the last match in his pocket, and he promised himself to hoard it for some desperate emergency.

He touched the end of the tunnel, or at least he thought he did, for a wall rose before him and he came to a halt.

"Now, where is the ghost?" he asked himself.

His foot, striking something, seemed to answer "here," and out came his last match.

Ned pulled off his hat and sheltered the flame within it, then he stooped and held the match close to the ground.

What did he see?

Could it be that he was looking down into the face of a dead man at the end of the Devil's Tunnel—that a human being lay on the wet stone, with his arms outstretched, and looking for all the world like a late victim of murder?

For once, as if to show him that he had come to a terrible place, the match burned longer than common, and fearing to lose the light it

made, the boy hastily lifted his hat and took therefrom a newspaper, which he carefully twisted and then fired, just as his match was expiring.

He had good light now, and one which the noxious vapors of the tunnel could not kill, and with it in one hand he looked again at the man at his feet.

He had never seen him before. To his knowledge no such a person had ever come to Ragged Robin. He was a fine-looking personage, with a sweeping mustache and clear-cut face. His age must have been something past forty.

Though the face looked natural, and even fresh, Ned saw that a mold covered the hands.

This showed that he had been a long time dead and that for weeks, perhaps months, he had lain in the tunnel.

The sight of the dead man mystified the boy.

"I wonder if The Count knew anything of this?" he asked himself. "This man was murdered, for here is a dark spot in the neck. Ah, he was stabbed from behind and perhaps brought to this place after the crime."

The next moment Eagle Ned made another startling discovery. The man's left hand clutched a piece of paper! Without hesitation the boy tore it from the dead man's clasp at the risk of destroying it, and holding it near the flame of his extemporized torch read some scrawled lines which seemed to still the heart that beat in his bosom.

"I have been stabbed in the dark. I write this, my last words, in the blackness of darkness and walled in till I die. My name is Judah Meeks. I came to Ragged Robin hunting for my own, but the Camp Spiders have struck me. This is my birthday, the 29th of May, and I must die on it. Who will avenge me? Who will break the web of the Camp Spiders and crush the Spiders themselves? Do it and have a dead man's blessing!"

"The 29th of May?" cried Eagle Ned. "Heavens, this is November and this man has been lying here all that time! Judah Meeks, eh? If I ever get out of here myself, I will find out something about him, and, if I ever can, I will avenge his death. I'm now doubly on guard; I must be sleepless now."

Then, his torch having burned out, he found himself in a gloom that seemed palpable. He was the companion of the dead!

#### CHAPTER II.

##### ANOTHER.

PHOCION, Ned's friend, came home and found the shanty uninhabited.

This person was a singular man who had roughed it nearly all his life. He wore a red beard, which did not enhance his good looks, nor were his long ape-like arms graceful appendages to his lank body.

Phocion had taken a fancy to the boy, who seemed to be a waif on the sea of life, and when Ned came to the camp the old prospector was prompt to offer him a home, and to tell him that so long as he remained his shanty door was open to him.

"I don't see what's come over the boy," said Phocion. "I have caught him out of nights, for he comes in at all hours. Mebbe he is lookin' for the lost sister an' mebbe he is up to something else. If the latter, he would better be careful, for this camp is not the place for a sly-boots. It is dangerous ground to people of this sort an' they wouldn't hesitate to set it up on the young 'un—not a bit!"

Phocion went out and walked down to where the doors of the bar-room lately visited by Eagle Ned stood open. He looked inside as he passed and seemed to take note of the crowd at the counter. A smile flitted across Phocion's face.

"Same old lay-out," he muttered, but not loud enough to reach the ears of the gang inside. "It's been the same old gang ever since I came to Ragged Robin. I don't see how Alta can stand it; but, mebbe she thinks she couldn't do better and so stays where she is."

Phocion was quitting the vicinity when he heard a footstep, and turning was face to face with a young girl.

"Bless me, if it isn't Alta herself!" he ejaculated, and then he leaned forward and questioned the fair creature.

"What am I out to-night for, Phocion?" repeated the girl, who was not yet nineteen. "I don't like to tell you, for they might not like it, but, murder has been committed!"

"Murder?" echoed the man, with a sudden pallor of face. "You don't mean to say that Eagle Ned, my little pard friend, has been—"

"Of course not! What put that in your head? Who would kill the boy, anyhow?"



But, murder has been committed. Some one has killed Lazarus!"

Phocion laughed.

"Killed Lazarus? I guess not, Alta. You have been dreaming, girl, and, by Jove! you are still but half-awake. I'd like to know who would do such a thing as that."

The girl for a reply clutched the man's sleeve and led him away.

"I will show you if you don't believe me. I discovered the body a little while ago, when it was still warm."

Phocion followed Alta in a half-dazed condition, and when she stopped and pointed at something lying on the ground between two shanties, he drew back as if shocked by the presence of death.

There, on his face, with his hands full of dark earth, lay the very man who a few hours before had told the night-loafers at the saloon that he believed Eagle Ned was not quite sound in the upper story.

Lazarus was a rolling stone, but a man of keen perception and some good traits. He came from the North and had a mine not far from the camp, but it had never paid him, so he said, and he was nearly always without money, hence his nickname.

After a while Phocion knelt and looked into the face of the dead.

"This man has been killed, sure enough," he said, looking up into the face of the breathless girl.

"I told you so, Phocion."

"So you did, Alta. Look! he has been stabbed in the neck. Don't you see where the blade hit him? Get down and look. You're a brave girl an' have lots of nerve. A hole like this doesn't scare you."

There was light enough, for the moon was high, to show Phocion and his companion the work of the deadly knife and for a moment Alta looked at it in silence.

"You go home an' I'll sound the alarm," said the miner. "Don't let on that you discovered the dead man. Let me have that credit."

She gave him a singular look, but did not cross him in his desires.

When she had vanished, Phocion lifted the head again and ran his hand underneath the collar.

"I don't feel it, but it was here," he said. "I saw it round his neck the day he an' I sat in the mine, an' he told me all he ever told any one about his life. He unbuttoned his collar and showed me the leathern string round his neck, but it isn't here now."

Phocion rose and went back to the heart of the camp. Once he looked toward the bar-room and seemed to hesitate, but all at once he moved toward it and entered at the open door.

He found the same old crowd at the bar, and after it had looked at him and he had returned the look with interest, he said:

"That's a dead man in camp."

A stir went over the crowd.

"A dead man, Phocion?" said one. "Who's dead?"

"Lazarus."

There was a genuine start on the part of several, and some one said that the miner had just quitted the place, and that it could not be that he was dead.

"But he is; found him myself. He's lying between two shanties as dead as a mackerel."

Saying this, Phocion called for a drink, and having drank it off, he looked once more at the crowd.

It seemed to Ned's friend that he wasn't thanked at all for imparting the startling information which had just fallen from his lips.

"Whar's the boy?" said a man who leaned against the door, and was looking at Phocion.

"What's that got ter do with the death of Lazarus?" was the instant retort.

"Nothin' much, p'raps, but the boy's liable to do anything. He's a loose hyer." The speaker touched his forehead. "He does some queer things; he bobs around the camp an' never says nothing to any one."

The brow of Phocion seemed to cloud.

"I'll answer for Eagle Ned. He doesn't know that Lazarus is dead, and, by Joshua! if you don't care that a murder's been committed in Ragged Robin, why—"

Just then the form of another miner appeared at the door, and a startled face was seen by all.

"Murder! murder!" cried this man. "Lazarus has been killed. He's lyin' twixt two shanties with a hole in his neck."

This startled the crowd, and in a moment Phocion was the only man in the bar-room, the bartender excepted.

"Look here; they don't fancy that boy o'

yers," said the vender of drinks. "They've been discussin' him all evenin', an' I'd advise you to git shut o' him as soon as possible."

The tall figure of Phocion seemed to sway as he turned full on the man and looked him in the eye.

"What hev they against Eagle Ned?" he asked in a husky voice.

"They don't like him."

"Is that all?"

"I guess that's the sum an' substance of it."

"Was Ned in hyer ter-night?"

"Yes."

"But he conducted himself squarely, didn't he?"

"Oh, yes—"

"Then, what hev they ag'in' him?"

At this juncture the form of a man passed the open door and he looked in upon Phocion with the leering countenance of a fiend.

"I can't tell you, only I know that it isn't safe for the boy to be with us any longer," answered the bartender.

"I'm his friend," said Phocion. "I don't allow any man or set of men to hurt or insult the boy. Why, he's an orphan; he had a sister once, but she was stolen from her cradle and the blow broke his mother's heart, an' when she died Eagle Ned lost the best friend he ever had. His father vanished in a queer manner, as if the curse of God war on the family; an', take it all in all, the boy has had a hard time of it."

"I don't know, I don't. Eagle Ned is good enough in his way; he never hurts any one, but they've set their heads ag'in' him and it would be best for him to vamose."

"We'll see about that," said Phocion. "We'll see about Ned's goin' off just to please some one," and with his lips welded beneath the red beard, he turned and walked from the den.

"Wal, I'll sw'ar. He talks as if he could buck ag'in' the hull camp," remarked the bartender, looking after the figure of Phocion. "The Spiders don't intend to stand any nonsense with that boy, they don't, an' the sooner that is understood by his friends the better."

Phocion crossed the Square to his own shanty but not without looking toward the spot where he and Alta had seen the dead body of Lazarus.

He saw a dark form come into view and watched it as it neared him.

"That is The Count," said Phocion under his breath. "He doesn't seem to have heard of the killin', but he'll know it s'oon enough, for The Count gets onto everything that takes place hyer."

For some little time the man with the red beard looked after The Count, and saw him take a stick from his bosom and apparently cut a notch into it.

"What does that mean, I wonder? What was he doin' with that stick? I don't know much about The Count, but he seems ter run things in Ragged Robin. Wonder if he is at the head of the game ag'in' Eagle Ned? I am goin' ter stand by the boy—I don't care what happens. But whar is he?"

Phocion had reached his shanty and opened the door; but no Ned greeted him, and he seemed to fear that something had already happened.

Something had, for at that moment a boy shut up in a dark tunnel fell forward on his face with a cry which no ears but those of bats heard, and it died away like a wail of death.

"Whar's the boy, anyhow?" cried Phocion turning from the empty shanty and seeking the starlight once more.

"Yer protege, eh?" said a voice so near him that he turned in an instant and looked at the speaker.

"Eagle Ned, I mean, of course."

The man he spoke to was smaller than he and as wiry as an Indian. Moreover he had but one eye, an optic that shone like a glowing coal, and when he spoke he leaned toward Phocion and grinned.

"Mebbe the Spider's stung him," laughed Nixy, as the man was called.

"The Spider?"

"Yes, don't you know?—the Camp Spiders I am talkin' about. Whar hev you been all this time, Phocion? Hol' hol' ha! ha! They say I've got a crack in my head; mebbe I hev; but I keep my one eye open an' it sees as much as two—sometimes. They think I don't know anything about the Spiders of the Black Mesa. No, of course I don't! If they have bitten Eagle Ned the boy will never comfort yer old age, nor find his sister."

Phocion caught the half-witted man by the arm and dragged him to his shanty.

"Now, Nixy, tell me what you know," he cried, drawing back from the man whom he had thrust into a chair.

"Ho, ho, I'm no fool, Captain Phocion. I don't want to be bitten by the Spiders," and springing up, Nixy ran out of the hut before he could be restrained.

### CHAPTER III.

#### STIRRUP STEVE'S RETURN.

THE body of Lazarus was carried to the main gambling den of Ragged Robin and laid out.

There was a good deal of excitement among those who came to look at the corpse but there was not much loud talking.

Phocion in his shanty was thinking of Nixy's last remarks and while he occupied the little place he wondered, too, what had become of Eagle Ned.

The boy's absence alarmed the man not a little and when he thought of going out and looking for him, the words of the man who had run off recurred to him.

The Camp Spiders! He had never heard of such an organization. He had lived in Ragged Robin ever since its founding and yet he was ignorant of the existence of such an order. Still, it might be, for Nixy was always on the alert and he was just the sort of person to pick up news.

By and by Phocion sneaked down to where the body lay, and entering, stood over the face of Lazarus.

Nearly every one had deserted the room and the light which had been turned low by some one gave but little satisfaction.

Phocion became convinced that some one was watching him and lifting his gaze suddenly he saw a figure steal from the door. There was something about this figure that startled the man and in a moment he was at the portal.

In another second he had left the house and stood alongside of the person he had detected.

"Who's dead in there?" asked this person, looking up into Phocion's face. "I came in but a moment ago and heard something had happened. I saw you alone with a corpse and thought I wouldn't disturb you. Who's dead, I say?"

"It's Lazarus," answered Phocion. "They found him dead near his shanty and he's in thar with a knife wound in his neck. Some one killed him an' in this camp."

The man addressed by Phocion was still a youth; he was quite handsome and his broad shoulders told that they could sustain a great weight. He was agile as a cat for all this, and every one knew Stirrup Steve, the youngest miner in the camp and a fine, whole-souled fellow who feared nothing.

"Whar hev you been, Steve?"

"I came in from the Diego Diggin's. I've had a long ride across the roughest country on the face of the globe an' when I saw the light of the camp I felt good, I can tell you."

"What do you know about the Camp Spiders?"

This question seemed to bring a queer look to the listener's eyes. He fixed his gaze upon Phocion and did not speak for a moment as if the query had taken his breath.

"The Camp Spiders?" he echoed. "What do you mean, Phocion?"

Phocion told Stirrup Steve what Nixy said, that such an order really existed and right in their midst. He had never heard of it, which was very strange, he said, as he had lived in Ragged Robin all the time and generally with his eyes open.

Stirrup Steve listened without interrupting him and when Phocion had finished the young man touched his arm.

"I don't know much about them."

"But you know a little, then?"

"Very little, Phocion."

"Tell me what you know?"

Stirrup Steve walked away with the arm of Phocion still in his grasp. The two went to the shanty occupied by the latter and when Phocion had seated himself Steve folded his arms and leaned against the wall.

"There used to be an order of this name in another camp far from here, but I did not think it had been revived. They wiped it out in Pin-Wheel; the Vigilantes hanged every mother's son of the members, and that was the end of it. I heard of this affair a long time ago; how they pulled up the Spiders until not one remained to weave a web of death. It was a clean wipe-out, Phocion."

"But we've got em hyer, if Nixy tells the truth."

"And do you think they are responsible for Lazarus's death?"

"Why not?"



"You should look at the corpse. You say he was killed by a knife stab in the neck."

"He was."

"Did you look further? The men who belonged to the Vigilantes who hanged the Spiders of Pin-Wheel had a certain mark tattooed on their arms—a rope with a running noose, I believe it was."

"Great heavens, there was such a mark on Lazarus's arm! I've seen it more than once, but he would never tell me what it meant. I begin to see through the whole thing now. Some one is avenging the death of the Spiders of Pin-Wheel."

For a moment silence reigned between the two men in the shanty, then Phocion said:

"There's more to be told, Steve. Eagle Ned has been missing since sundown. I can't find the boy high or low."

"That's nothing very strange. I've seen him in the mountains, and sometimes he is gone twenty-four hours."

"But right on the heels of this murder!" put in the man with the red beard. "I don't like that part of it. What if the Spiders should hold a grudge ag'in' him?"

Stirrup Steve turned and looked out upon the Plaza. He saw a man crossing it and looking the second time, said to Phocion with a smile:

"We still have The Count with us, I see."

The bearded man started a little at these words.

"I guess we'll always have him byer," he said.

"He is the curse of the camp."

"And its nabob," added Steve. "By the way, does Alta know anything of this crime?"

"A good deal. She discovered the dead body of Lazarus, but I persuaded her to let me have the credit of it. Alta stood it well; she looked at the wound without a shudder. She's a gold mine to some one, boy."

Stirrup Steve blushed a little which heightened the color of his full cheeks and he looked away for a moment.

"I'll see you later," he said to Phocion and in a little while the two were on the street once more and had separated.

Stirrup Steve went to his own cabin which had not been inhabited for a few days and shut the door behind him.

"So Lazarus is killed, eh?" he said in audible tones to himself. "So he has been stabbed and Phocion says he wore the sign of the Vigilantes of Pin-Wheel. Can it be that the order of the Camp Spiders has been revived? What is its object now—to hunt down and slay all who belonged to the band that wiped it out of existence more than three years ago? If this is its mission who will be safe? No one knows who all belonged to the Vigilantes; they kept the identity of their membership a profound secret, though, after the wiping out, there was no need of concealment."

The young man went out and rapped lightly at the door of a well-to-do shanty near the middle of the camp.

In another second he stood face to face with Alta.

The girl with a pleased countenance held the door open for him and when he had entered the plain little room he turned upon her to see that her face was white and her eyes full of singular eagerness.

"I am glad you are back safe, yet I almost wished you had not come," she said. "There is death—murder in the camp, and—"

"Fear not for me," was the quick interruption. "I guess I am not a marked victim, Alta."

The girl then told about the finding of Lazarus's body and Steve listened with interest as if he had not heard the same story within the last few minutes.

"Phocion is alarmed about the boy. He does not know what I saw before we found Lazarus. I did not tell him for fear of making a scene, but I will tell you, Steve. I saw The Count and Eagle Ned going down the street together; they were walking side by side and I lost sight of them toward The Count's main mine."

"Toward Red Rattlesnake, Alta?"

"Yes. By and by The Count came back alone and not long after that I discovered the murder."

Stirrup Steve thought a moment and then turned his head. Alta did not see the look that filled his eyes.

"You are well-acquainted with Ned, Alta?" he suddenly asked.

"We are friends."

"He never kept his secrets from you?"

The girl laughed.

"You mean about his hunt for the lost sister? He has told me all he knows a score of

times. I have listened to him whenever he cared to tell the story; but why this question, Steve?"

"Eagle Ned may have been too prying for some people. He was always on the lookout for that sister, though my opinion is that she is lost to him forever. He is playing detective with all his might, but the chances are against him. So he went toward The Count's bonanza with The Count himself?"

"Yes."

"And The Count came back alone?"

"He did."

"None of this to Phocion, Alta," said Steve. "We are on the edge of some tough times and Ragged Robin is going to see a reign of terror. If you don't want to stay—"

"I want to stay," broke in the girl, her eyes aflame. "I don't want to run off. I am interested in Eagle Ned and if he has fallen into the web of the Camp Spiders I want to help him out if I can."

Stirrup Steve looked down into the upturned eyes of the beautiful speaker and felt a thrill pervade his bosom.

Alta was brave and when he noticed that her hands were clinched and that she was not trembling, he thought that she was cool enough to remain in Ragged Robin during the drama which he felt was about to open in earnest.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### THE WARNING.

A LONG room under ground.

On one of the walls of gray stone is drawn in dark lines the picture of a spider.

Everything about the hideous-looking creature is complete, the long legs, the large head and gleaming eyes. The hand that drew it was the hand of an artist, the man who pictured the spider on the stone was a good hand at drawing, and his work was true to nature, but so large and hideous.

In the chamber stands a table upon which sits a box covered with dark cloth, but on the top of it is another spider, the exact counterpart of the one on the wall, though not so large.

Suddenly the door set in the wall at one end of the place swings open and a man steps forward. He wears a black mask upon which the spider shows again and after him file six men, all tall in stature and possessing the physiques of giants.

The leader of the masked six advances to the middle of the chamber and turns upon his followers.

"We have struck and the dead lies still," said he in stern voice which had no echo in that chamber. "We have inflicted upon the guilty the penalty of death and there still remain more victims."

There was no answer; the men whom he addressed stood and gazed at the speaker from behind the masks that fitted their faces to a nicety.

"Who shall be the next?" asked the leader, taking from his pocket a little packet which he moved toward the box on the table.

"Let us draw and see," said one of the men.

The captain of the Camp Spiders opened the box and threw into it the package which he had drawn forth. Then the lid was shut down and all ranged themselves along the stand.

One after another they put their hands into the box and drew out a bit of paper which they did not look at, but concealed in their hands. They had drawn out all the bits of paper there were in the box and the captain of the Spiders turned to his men with gleaming eyes.

"Let the man who has received the commission make no failure. The name of the next victim is in his hand. Let him see that the blow does not fall short, nor fail in any way."

Half a minute later the room is deserted and the spider on the wall has no company. Silence comes down upon the place and the men are far away.

Meantime the corpse of Lazarus incumbers a pine board in the back room of Black Burt's place, but the time has arrived for its burial. A number of men take it up and carry it to the little cemetery beyond the mines and without ceremony the dead is left to sleep until the Last Great Day; then the burial party file back to the camp and take a drink at the bar.

But what has become of Eagle Ned?

We left the boy in the Devil's Tunnel alone with the dead man discovered there.

As if to see what had become of him a man went down to the mine and groped his way through the darkness. When he reached the mouth of the tunnel he stopped and lighted a match.

The tunnel had been walled up and that with-

in the last few hours. The work of the masons was still moist and while the man with the match looked at it he grew stern in the face and his hands seemed to shake.

"Is he in thar?" he asked himself. "Did Eagle Ned come to this place and is he the tenant of the tunnel? There is no getting to him if this is so, but what have they against the young'un?"

Phocion turned back, but had not gone far when he ran against some one whom he instantly clutched and held.

"Unhand me!" said a voice.

"I won't till I git ready," cried he of the red beard. "I want to know what you've done with the boy?"

"With the boy?" echoed the same voice.

"Are you mad? You must be Phocion."

"I am Phocion. I want to know what has become of Eagle Ned."

"Take your hands from my throat or you'll get no reply from me."

Phocion obeyed and with a match to show him the man before him he fell back a step and looked. But no one was there. The person he had clutched had vanished like a fox in the dark and the red-beard could not help laughing to himself.

"That was The Count. I knew his voice," said Phocion. "He can't fool me. What was he doing here; but why not? This is his bonanza an' I'm the man who, in his mind, had no business in this corridor. But I want to find out what's become of Eagle Ned."

Nothing was left for Phocion to do but to go back, which he did, and not long afterward he stood in his own shanty and thought over the strange adventures he had just had.

He was now convinced that Nixy had not lied; he was sure there were "Spiders" in camp and spiders of the deadliest sort. The walling up of the Devil's Tunnel told him something that made his very blood run cold, and when he thought that Eagle Ned, the sister-hunter, might be in its dark depths, he sprang up and grasped his revolver, saying that he would go down to the haunt of the toughs of Ragged Robin and force their secret from them.

But he did not. No, Phocion slept all night without waking in his shanty and the next morning awoke to find something lying on his pillow. This was a note written in a strange hand and when he opened it he saw at once that it was a warning.

"Keep a still tongue in your head," he read. "In this lies your own safety and that of those dear to you. Don't cross the magnates of Ragged Robin; don't try to find out what has become of Eagle Ned. Time will clear up that mystery. Don't be a fool, Phocion."

Phocion looked at the note a dozen times and tried to make out from whose hand it had come, but he was unable to do so. He folded it at last and concealed it in his bosom as the safest place for it, though he should have destroyed it and given it to his breakfast fire.

The day passed without incident, though Phocion could hardly refrain from going to The Count's cabin and asking him why he had given him the slip in the dark. The letter so mysteriously left on his pillow was all that kept him from doing so, and when the day waned and he had not played fool in any way, he was satisfied that, after all, he could keep his head and not give the writer away.

It cost Phocion many a pang to sit still when he knew what was happening around him. The presence of the Camp Spiders was ever uppermost in his mind, and he seemed to think that he was a marked man for having been caught in the mine by its owner.

When another night came there slipped into Ragged Robin a boy who did not look at all like Eagle Ned. He had none of those long rich locks which made Ned so conspicuous; his face was darker than the sister-hunter's; he looked taller, and those who saw him sidle up to Black Burt's counter took him for just what he afterward said he was—a young half-breed who had been raised among the lodges of the Comanches.

Phocion saw this boy the next day. He caught sight of him on the Plaza, showing some of the toughs of Ragged Robin how he could jump, an exercise Eagle Ned never indulged in, and after watching him a short time, the red-beard turned away with a smile.

"He's as active as a kitten an' if Ned war byer I'd pit him ag'in' the young cross an' hev some fun," he said.

The half-breed took rapidly to the ways of the camp. He said he had left the lodges because of some trouble between him and his foster-parents, and before another night he had been



invited to sleep under The Count's roof, and from that day he was to be considered as a part of Jack Jargo's household.

This household consisted of a woman named Selina and Jack himself. Selina was one of those willowy Mexican women with keen black eyes, and by many was called The Count's sister. They looked very much alike, their voices were strangely similar, their faces cast in the same mold, and on several occasions Jack had not denied that they were brother and sister.

Selina took ill to the boy in the house; she looked askance at Doodles as the youth was called, and on several occasions was seen to eye him like a hawk. Selina had the tread of a cat and the strength of a tigress. She was always doing something for Jack, and Doodles saw her polishing a dagger before he was three hours in the house.

"How would you like this in your heart?" laughed the woman, suddenly holding up the blade to the boy as he passed through the room where she sat at work.

Doodles laughed.

"I've seen men with such a knife in their hearts," he said. "It killed them."

"I should say so, boy," cried Selina. "You say you have lived among the Comanches. Was it near the border?"

Selina meant the Mexican border.

"It was near the border," and Doodles drew nearer and looked at the glittering blade which the dark-eyed creature was polishing, though it seemed bright enough without any such labor.

"You're half-Indian, eh? You are really nothing. You may be a spy for all we know."

Doodles drew back and gave Selina a quick look, like a person insulted.

"Oh, you needn't look that way at me!" cried the nabob's sister. "I don't like 'mixes'—that is, I don't like people with two kinds of blood in their veins. If I catch you playing spy here your life won't be worth a pinch of dirt."

There was a nameless terror in the very eyes of this beautiful woman, for Selina was beautiful. Doodles turned and looked toward the window to escape them for a moment.

"Did you hear me?" and a hand fell upon his arm and closed there like a vise. "You don't want to be caught playing spy against us. If I see you at such work, I'll let you know how this dagger feels in your own heart. See?" and the blade was held before the youth's face, and he looked from it into the gleaming tigress orbs of the speaker.

"I play spy? What do you mean? Don't I know who my friends are?" and breaking from her grip the half-breed boy ran from the chamber and shut the door in Selina's face.

#### CHAPTER V.

##### A DECLARATION OF LOVE.

THE mystery of Eagle Ned's vanishment troubled Phocion not a little. The man with the red beard could not think what had become of his *protege*. 'Tis true he had the message which had been left on his pillow, but that was not enough. He wanted to know what had become of Ned, and the fact that he had seen the Devil's Tunnel walled up was almost proof enough that the sister-hunter was somewhere within it, a prisoner, if not dead from the foul gases of the disgusting place.

Captain Jack, as he was sometimes called instead of The Count, ruled Ragged Robin with a heavy hand. Nearly everything earned by the miners went into his coffers, and he it was who was making all the money in the long run.

It was the fifth evening after Eagle Ned's disappearance, and Alta was standing in the door of the cabin which she called home, when she caught sight of a dark figure approaching her. At once she knew it to be The Count, and to her surprise she saw him nearing her. He was clad in new garments which had arrived by the last stage, and looked handsomer than ever before, for, in spite of his face, which wore the Mexican's cast and color, there was not a handsomer man in Arizona than this same Jack Jargo.

Alta watched the tall fellow for awhile and then shut the door, but in a moment her heart seemed to stand still as raps sounded in her ears.

In came The Count doffing his bat with its laced band, and Alta, blushing, confronted him, wondering why she had been visited at that hour.

There was a light in the man's eyes that seemed to bode her no good, and when he spoke she was almost sure of it.

"I have come, Alta, to make a proposition to you," said Jack, rising on his heels as if to lend dignity to his utterance. "The fact is that there is no use of your living alone among the toughs of

Ragged Robin. You have lived here long enough to know something about them. They are, for the most part, a tough lot and you are too nice a girl to be here unprotected. Now, I have a house that discounts all the rest in camp, and my housekeeper is willing to take you in with us. Of course I don't want you to go to the palace unwillingly, of course not," he repeated. "I have thought a good deal of you for a long time, and I want to see you happy with lots of wealth around you."

This was a plain declaration of love in a singular way; but it was just like the man who had spoken it.

Alta felt the red mounting to the temples, and as it was impossible to avoid the searching eyes of the man in the house, she resolved to give him as plain an answer and take the consequences.

"I don't want to quit the old cabin. I have been happy here and your palace could not increase my happiness."

"But see what you would gain by being the bride of the nabob of the Black Mesa," put in The Count. "You don't know what you are missing girl."

Alta thought she would be willing to miss a great deal, not to be the wife of Jack Jargo, the man of mystery and some crime. She was willing to miss all the happiness he prophesied to remain single, or to become Stirrup Steve's wife instead of his, and it was on her tongue to tell him so if he insisted.

"You won't, eh? You don't like me, hey?" cried the man, his face changing color all at once and his eyes getting a new light which they had not known before.

"I will be plain, Captain Jargo, said Alta. "I don't want to marry now and I cannot give you any encouragement."

He fell back his eyes riveted upon her and his hands glued together, the long, yellow fingers twined one about the other.

"You mean that you won't; I understand you. Then, look here. You don't know what you have rejected. You don't know what you have missed. You may not have a home always."

"That is true. I am willing to take things as they come in life."

Her calmness seemed to irritate him the more. "I am master here. I run this camp. I am The Count."

"The Count of what?" was on Alta's tongue, but she did not speak the words.

She looked at him and saw that he was turning white again, a way he had when unduly excited.

The tall figure of Jack Jargo strode to the door and looked back at Alta in the light of her little lamp.

She felt that trouble had come, that her rejection of the man's suit was the beginning of the dark days, and when she saw him move to the door and lay his hand on the latch, she felt her heart rise in her throat, but only for a moment.

He paused there a moment and then said:

"We'll see about this. You may think otherwise of The Count before you are much older."

That was all. The next minute the form of the man was out on the Plaza and he was moving toward his palace.

"What have I done?" cried Alta, throwing her hands to her head in the agony of the moment. "I have brought about more trouble. I am now marked. By the Camp Spiders? Does he belong to them? Is he at the head of the band that killed Lazarus, for Phocion is sure the man was murdered by a band of ruffians?"

"Don't be alarmed, Alta; keep a stout heart in your bosom."

The girl turned like a flash to the window from whence the sound seemed to come, but she saw no one. She went to the door and threw it open, but saw nothing outside but the shadows of night, and these showed her nothing.

She fell back and saw the lamp flicker on the table and all at once it went out as if the breath of a demon of darkness had extinguished it. With a cry, Alta sprang to the table and seized the lamp, carried it to the window and looked at it in the moonlight.

What did this mean? Were there demons at work?

Presently footsteps came to the door and she grasped a revolver and placed herself on the defensive.

The portal opened and the form of Phocion greeted her.

"I am glad you have come," cried the waif of Ragged Robin. "I don't know what made me afraid, but I am all in a tremble."

"The Count was here?" said Phocion, as he came in.

"He was here."

"What did he want, Alta?"

Should she tell this man? He was a true friend; there was nothing really bad about Phocion, and so, after a moment's thought, she told all about the man's visit and was listened to with great attention by the miner.

"You've made an enemy, but you've strengthened friendship," was the answer. "The Count runs the camp, but you run your own heart and that is worth all the camps in Arizona. He wanted you to marry him, did he? He offered you a home in the palace with that tiger sister of his? A nice nest, truly. Why, I would sooner be walled up in the Devil's Tunnel where there is no escape at all, as to live in the shadow of the hand of Selina."

Then Alta thought of the voice she had heard and while Phocion listened to her narration of it, a queer expression stole over his face and he seemed to lose his thoughts.

"You heard it at the window, did you?" said he at last. "I remember now meeting Doodles, the half-breed boy on the Plaza, but of course he had nothing to do with it."

"It was not the voice of Doodles. I am already familiar with that. It seemed to be a voice I have heard somewhere, yet, at the same time, it had a strange, almost supernatural sound."

Phocion shook his head.

"It puzzles me, but I am going to get to the bottom of it if it takes a lifetime," he remarked.

"But you don't want to incur the enmity of The Count."

"Ho, I have that already. I reckon he hasn't forgiven me for catching him by the throat in the mine when I was looking for Eagle Ned. His enmity? That's better to have than his love," and with this the figure of the red-beard left the house and Alta was alone once more.

Phocion crossed the Plaza toward the house inhabited by The Count and Selina.

The building rose tall and huge before him and as he was nearing it a form crept from the shadows and darted off. It was the form of a boy and the keen eyes of Phocion recognized Doodles, the half-breed.

"That's a queer game for the adopted to play," said the man. "He seems to have been watching the house and yet he sleeps there. Maybe he doesn't like Selina."

At this minute the door opened and Phocion had time to step back and out of sight when Selina herself made her appearance and passed him. He saw that the woman was clothed in close-fitting garments that made no unnecessary spread and when she went away he followed her.

Selina led Phocion a long chase, but entered the mine where the tunnel was and after seeing her once beyond the threshold he entered it himself.

The red-beard was creeping down a narrow corridor which he knew would take him to the closed mouth of the tunnel and was near it when he heard a sound like the dropping of something soft-footed from a considerable height.

In an instant Phocion backed against the stone wall and drew his knife.

He heard something run away in the dark and after awhile the same footsteps came back.

Presently the man heard a laugh and then felt something brush his hand.

Half a minute later he caught the glimmer of a match and by its light saw a form moving down the narrow passage.

"Doodles, by Jove!" cried Phocion under his breath. "What in the name of common sense is that yellow boy doing here?"

Doodles moved on, now and then drawing his little torch along the walls, until at last he stooped at the mouth of the tunnel and looked at the solid masonry which told Phocion that beyond it lay the moldering body of Eagle Ned.

"That boy is onto the same thing," muttered the red-beard. "He seems to know that the boy is dead in the web of the Camp Spiders."

#### CHAPTER VI.

##### PHOCION AND DOODLES.

It was a strange sight for Phocion to see Doodles kneeling at the mouth of the Devil's Tunnel, looking at the solid masonry as if he wished he was strong enough to tear it down and crawl into the hidden corridor.

He rose suddenly, threw his match to the ground, and vanished in the dark.

"So!" laughed the man with the red beard. "Doodles is already a mystery as great as that which envelops the death of Lazarus. What brought him to Ragged Robin?"

As there was no answer to this, Phocion went



away and forgot all about the woman he had followed to the place. If he had followed Selina instead of letting Doodles claim all his attention he might have witnessed certain scenes which would have opened his eyes still more.

He might have seen the dark-eyed woman enter a small chamber, the door of which was curiously set in the wall. He might have seen her proceed to one corner where she found a wooden chest of old-style which she opened with a small key. Selina took from the chest a package which she opened and held before the light she had made.

Her eyes were all aglow with a singular light, and her hands seemed to delight in opening the package in them.

Selina uttered a cry when she had accomplished this and when she saw glittering in her brown palms something that looked like diamonds.

There was a necklace of gems and they shone with dazzling luster in the gleam of her lamp.

She looked at them some time when she put them back, relocked the chest and went back. She left the mine perhaps unwatched by Doodles and retraced her steps to the palace. If Phocion could have seen her he would have thought more of Selina's cunning than ever, for the door in the wall she had found in the dark as if she had the eyes of the owl.

Doodles was asleep in his chamber when the woman came home.

She stole on tip-toe to the room and looked in upon the half-breed boy.

"You don't want to follow me," said she, showing the hilt of a dagger while she looked. "The moment you play spy at my heels that moment you are doomed, and the Spider will sting you to the death. The Spider? Ha, ha, it has already fastened its fangs on the other one, and ere long there will be another dead person in camp."

Like a cat, Selina stole back to her room, but the moment she closed the door the boy sprang from his couch and listened at the portal.

Doodles's eyes were full of eagerness and he had all the cunning of a trained bloodhound as he listened there for the fading feet of The Count's sister.

Instead of going back to the couch in the chamber to which he had been assigned on coming into Jack Jargo's household, he slipped from the house and made his way down the street.

At the door of Phocion's hut he stopped and appeared to listen. He seemed to take an interest in the man with the red beard and it looked as if he was playing spy on him.

From Phocion's shanty he went over to Alta's humble home and there he stopped some time with his eyes on the alert and his ears glued to the pane.

All at once the figure of The Count crossed the path of the half-breed boy. He caught sight of Jack as he came from Black Burt's den and followed him, but at respectful distance. He did not want to be caught on the track of the lord of Ragged Robin, nor was he anxious to feel the grip of the big yellow hands.

Doodles swung himself from a ledge near the main mine and remained crouched in the shadows some time. Everything was still. Not far off lay the mountain graveyard where the body of Lazarus had been "planted," and beyond it stood the tall pines that lifted their heads above the mounds.

Suddenly this silence was broken by a cry and then all was still.

It was so startling that even the cool-headed Doodles sprang to his feet and listened. He knew it was the cry of a man, a man in his death-agony, and he seemed to wait for the return of the slayer.

Doodles did not have to wait very long for a figure to cross his path. Presently he saw one coming toward him and in a second he became as a rock on the ground. No one saw him. The eye of the nighthawk would not have found him there.

Down the trail moved the figure he saw and when it had vanished, Doodles rushed away but not after it.

Half a minute later he was bending over a form on the ground and he was looking onto a face rapidly growing white with the strange hue of death.

Another victim of the Camp Spiders!

The half-breed boy stooped until his face almost touched that of the man on the ground. The closing eyes saw him, but their owner seemed to shrink from the dark face of the Comanche's protegee.

A hand red and huge came up and fell heavily upon Doodles's shoulder.

"You know who did this, but you won't tell, will you?" said the dying man. "I have been

killed by the same band that found Lazarus, but you belong to the prince of demons and of course you won't tell what you know."

With a gurgle the man turned over and seemed to bury his face in the ground.

"Who did this?" asked Doodles.

"Who? Ah, you know, for you are his slave!"

That was the last utterance that came from the lips kissing the dark soil of the mountain camp. The man gave one shudder, his shoulders were drawn up and when Doodles looked again he had stretched himself out like a giant and was dead.

The boy rose and looked all about him. He had a secret, but what would he do with it? Would he go and raise the alarm? Would he run into Black Burt's and tell the night owls there that on a certain spot lay Red Mart stabbed as Lazarus had been and probably by the same hand?

He did nothing of the kind. Instead of raising the alarm, Doodles, as if he had the fear of Jack Jargo before his eyes, went back to the palace and crept to his little room.

Let some one else find the dead man. Let another than he discover the second victim of the Camp Spiders. He was but a boy and lived with the boss of the camp, and was not the person to put his own head in danger, or to throw himself into the death web of the mountain terror.

It was a long night for Doodles.

The next morning he looked toward the graveyard with the scenes of the past night fresh before him and wondered who would be the first to find the victim. He came down and caught the eyes of Selina in her room. The woman looked searchingly at him and Doodles wondered what she would say if she knew that he had been at her heels and had followed her to the mine?

All at once there ran across the Plaza a man with broad shoulders and a flowing beard.

Doodles saw him halt in front of Black Burt's and as he left the house he distinctly heard what he said.

"Red Mart's follered Lazarus!" cried the miner, who was frightened as with a nameless terror. "I've jest found him on his face near the clump of lightning-struck pines. He's as dead as a mackerel, an' in his neck is a hole."

Those who heard these words looked at one another, and by and by a line of men crossed the Square and followed the discoverer to the tragic spot.

Sure enough there lay the body of the murdered man, but this time the event did not cause much comment. Men looked a moment and then turned away, some without remark, and all with their thoughts at work.

Doodles, who had followed the crowd, looked into the faces of all, and when he had seen the last one enter the saloon, as if all roads in Ragged Robin led to it, he turned away.

"That makes two," said a voice so near the half-breed boy that he turned and looked at the speaker.

The red beard of Phocion waved in the wind, and the boy saw that his teeth were hard shut. The old man seemed to have aged much since the vanishment of Eagle Ned, and while Doodles eyed him he seemed on the eve of going to where he stood, but he did not.

"Come here, boy," said the red-beard.

Doodles looked a moment longer and then went forward. As he approached Phocion, he saw the keen eyes of the tall man riveted upon him, and when the hand touched him he was drawn to the miner's side.

"What do you think about this thing?" asked Phocion. "You must have an opinion if you are half Injun."

"I know nothin'," said the youth.

"I didn't ask you for what you knew. I only asked what you think. There have been two men killed within the last few days, an' both have been wiped out in the same manner—stabbed in the neck with a blade long enough to reach their hearts. First it was Lazarus, now it is Red Mart. They call you Doodles. Was that your name in Comanchedom?"

"It was," said Doodles, drawing back until he was released by Phocion.

"Well, you either don't want to talk or you won't, one or t'other," grinned the tall miner, and in another second Doodles was running off, followed by the eyes of the man who had released him.

"Hang it all, the eyes of that boy have a familiar look when you get right onto them," muttered Phocion. "They remind me of Eagle Ned's, they are so keen and clear. But I can't get that last sting of the Spiders out of my head.

I wonder if the insect won't turn on me soon, as I am rather anxious to discover certain secrets."

Yes, Phocion, the eye of the Spider is upon you, and already you stand in the shadow of the terrible death felt by Lazarus and Red Mart.

As for Doodles, the mysterious, he had vanished, and Phocion stood looking after him, as if he thought he had dismissed him too soon.

## CHAPTER VII.

### IN THE FATAL WEB.

THE half-breed boy went back to the house occupied by The Count and his sister.

All was still and for once he did not pass under the keen, suspicious eye of Selina. When he came to look for The Count he discovered that he was not to be found in the house and this somewhat surprised him. Did he know that Red Mart had been murdered and was he out somewhere trying to sift the mystery of the death to the bottom?

All at once Doodles knew that there was some new excitement in the camp. He heard a commotion in the Square and looking out he saw a number of men having in their grip Stirrup Steve.

The youth was calm and his eye sought out the men one by one and looked them coolly in the face. Doodles watched these events for a little while when he was disturbed by the entrance of Selina. She came in without much noise and when the boy turned and saw her her eyes seemed to blaze.

"They have the young gentleman in the grip of the court," said she, leaning toward Doodles in her eagerness to impress the fact on his mind.

"What is up?"

"They've found the man who killed Red Mart."

"You don't mean Steve?"

"I mean no one else," and Selina went to the window which commanded a view of the Plaza. "They have it solid on him and we shall have a hanging before to-morrow night."

The youth turned once more to the window and saw Stirrup Steve taken off by the mob. He knew what was in store for the young miner if the hands of the Spiders were upon him. He knew that he would be hanged without mercy, that if the least evidence, even circumstantial, could be held against him, he would be carried to the merciless noose of Ragged Robin and strung up in the light of the sun.

For a moment Doodles watched these proceedings which were seen by the light of the moon which painted the Plaza in white and when he heard Selina glide from the room he stole from the house.

The first man he ran across was The Count.

"Have you come out to see the young prisoner?" asked Jack. "They seem to have a death-hold on him and if they can prove what they say, there will be food for the birds for we won't let him lie on the mountain."

Doodles saw in the eye of the speaker a fierce, eager gleam and when he passed on the boy stood like one petrified in the moonlight.

Stirrup Steve, Alta's friend and lover, arrested for murder?

Nearly everything seemed possible in Ragged Robin and Doodles with a good deal of intelligence in his eyes for a half-breed, seemed to reflect while he watched the vanishing figure of The Count of the Black Mesa.

He slipped down to Black Burt's and glided into the bar-room where the crowd was.

There he found the subject of the murder and arrest discussed by all, and with his ears open the youth took in everything that fell from the lips of the mountain toughs.

"Ain't the knife enough to fasten the whole thing on him?" cried a man who ran his hand through his long, sandy beard. "It was found near the body and when he came back to look for it, why, we caught him, for Bill yonder had found the blade an' everybody knew it for his."

Doodles seemed to start at this. What, Stirrup Steve's knife found near the corpse of Red Mart? That was bad.

The sentiment was wholly against the young miner. In the first place, they had never taken kindly to Steve because he would not mix in the wild orgies of the dens of Ragged Robin; then, he owned a mine which made him some money, none of which he wasted at the faro tables of the camp, but kept it for a sister he said who lived somewhere in the East.

Doodles heard a good deal while he listened in the saloon. He eagerly drank in every word, betraying by nothing that his sympathies might be with the man who seemed to have no friends at all, and as he lived under the same roof with



The Count, the men who talked did not for a moment think that his heart might be with the prisoner.

Meantime the news of the arrest of Stirrup Steve for the murder of Red Mart had spread throughout the camp.

It reached the ears of Phocion who took the tidings to Alta's door, but paused there as if he had not heart enough to tell her.

"Come in, Phocion," said the girl, opening the door so suddenly that the man with the red beard fell back with a start. "I know something of what has happened, but you don't believe it."

"Believe it? never, Alta!" said Phocion as he carried his figure across the threshold. "They have caught the wrong man, and, then," he lowered his voice—"then, I guess they want a victim."

"I understand you, Phocion. You mean the Camp Spiders. They want a victim; they want to hang an innocent man for their own crimes."

The man had to look at the girl, she spoke with such a coolness that he was astounded. Her face was white, and her eyes clear and beautiful.

"Where is he?" she asked at last.

"They have taken him home and they've put a guard over the shanty. He will be watched until—"

Phocion paused and looked askance at Alta.

"Until they take him out to hang him. I know what you keep back, Phocion. They say they found his knife near the body. Well, what does that signify?"

The red-beard was silent.

"He may have been robbed of that knife. What does he say?"

"I don't know; I haven't heard his defense."

"Will they hang him without trial?"

Phocion's lips seemed to meet beneath the red hairs.

"They dare do anything," he said. "The Spiders have taken possession of Ragged Robin, and besides killing Lazarus and Red Mart they've made way with Eagle Ned."

"You believe that, Phocion?"

"I do. They killed the boy for a purpose; he was too knowing for them; he was finding out something. That boy was trying to find the lost sister, and somehow or other he was killed to prevent him from discovering the truth."

The eyes of Alta were riveted upon the speaker, but she did not reply.

"I may be talking too much myself, but I can't help it," continued Phocion. "I liked Eagle Ned because he was a good boy and seemed to have but few friends. He had eyes like those of the young half-breed who came to The Count's the other day, and they were about the same size. The young mixed blood is doing some strange work. I have caught him at Selina's heels, and he seems to be everywhere, just as if he were watching The Count who took him in and gave him a home."

At this juncture a sound without was heard, and Phocion looked toward the window.

A hand rose and tapped on the pane.

In an instant Alta sprang forward and caught sight of a paper lying on the narrow sill.

She ran out and took possession of it, bringing it back and displaying it to the man inside.

"Who left it there? Did you see no one?"

"I saw nobody," answered the girl. "I looked up and down the street, but it was deserted."

Phocion took the paper which Alta extended and drew near the lamp. He opened it and looked at it for a moment with the eyes of Alta fastened upon him.

"This means something I can't just figure out," said he, lifting his eyes and encountering those of the girl near him. "The writer of this note wants me to keep a still tongue in my head."

"Then it wasn't intended for me?" cried Alta.

"It seems not. A still tongue in my head? That means that if I don't I will feel the sting of the Camp Spiders, I reckon."

"It must mean that, Phocion. You must obey, for if they sting you where will I find a friend?"

Alta came forward and her eyes caught the sudden gleam of defiance which lit up the orbs before her.

"That's pretty hard for me to do under the circumstances. If I thought Eagle Ned was alive, if I could only think that he isn't cooped up in the darkness of the Devil's Tunnel, I could be still, but believing that the boy has been foully dealt with, I don't know."

The next instant the bronzed hand of Phocion crumpled the paper and his gaze wandered to the window.

"That's a face!" he cried, springing forward, revolver in hand. "I saw it plainly."

He flung wide the door and ran out.

"Halt!" Alta heard him cry.

In another moment the report of the miner's weapon awoke the echoes of the camp and then he came back with a laugh.

"I didn't shoot to kill, only to let the fellow know that I'm going to stand no foolishness."

"Who was it?"

"Who do you think, Alta? It was that infernal young spy what came to camp the other day. It was The Count's new *protege*."

"Doodles?"

"The young and cat-like Doodles. The next time it may be a bullet in the back. I could have dropped him just now, but I thought I would give him a reminder of what will come if he persists in playing spy on everybody in camp."

Phocion took out the paper and read it again. His eyes seemed to soften and then their fierce light went out entirely.

"For your sake I'll keep still, girl," he said, touching Alta's hand. "I don't want you to be left without a friend in Ragged Robin, but I don't think it will come to that. Good-night," and with a final look the red-beard went out, leaving the waif of the Black Mesa standing in the middle of the room like a person in a trance.

"My God!" cried Alta suddenly. "If they hang Stirrup Steve for the murder of Red Mart they will send an innocent soul to the noose."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### ON THE TRAIL AT LAST.

It was midnight within Jack Jargo's palace, so-called.

The house was still, for no light was to be seen anywhere, but there was one person who was not asleep.

Down the stair leading to the room in which lodged the half-breed boy came a figure which made no noise at all on the carpet that covered the steps.

In a little while it had lost itself in one of the lower rooms, and there it stood revealed as Doodles.

The Count himself was absent from the house at the time, and nothing was seen of Selina.

By and by Doodles appeared in the bed-chamber of The Count's sister and went toward her rich cabinet, which, years before, had graced the table of a Mexican belle. It was a rich cabinet, small and locked, and stood on the table at one side of the room.

What did Doodles want in the bedroom of the nabob's sister, and at that hour of the night when the house was still and its mistress away?

The half-breed boy glided to the cabinet and leaned forward to inspect its carved doors.

By and by he took from his pocket a little wire that looked like a watch-spring and inserted it into the lock.

In a moment the door yielded to the work of the wire, and Doodles swung it open.

Reaching in his hand, he took something from the cabinet, thrust it into his bosom and retired as noiselessly as he had entered the room. He crept back up the steps, disappearing beyond the door of his own chamber where he struck a light in one corner.

He now took from his bosom the packet he had abstracted from Selina's cabinet and opened it. It was a leathern case such as sometimes contains jewels, and sure enough he drew forth a necklace of pearls.

The boy started and almost betrayed himself by a cry.

He turned the necklace over and over in his hands; he looked at it from all points, his eyes meanwhile glittering with a fierce light and when he had looked at it some time he put it back in the case and went down the steps again.

No one saw him replace the necklace in the cabinet in Selina's room; no one saw him creep back to his own chamber and there look at a single pearl which he had taken from the treasure.

By and by the front door of the mountain palace opened and the form of Selina stood there. If she had returned a moment sooner she might have witnessed some of the transactions we have described; she might have seen the boy she had threatened emerge from her room and her hand might have caught him with the jewels in his possession.

But Selina had come home too late for this and Doodles had played the game through successfully.

Selina went to her room and halted in the middle of the place.

All at once she turned as a sound fell upon her ears, and the next second she opened the

door to stand face to face with The Count, her brother.

The nabob looked pleased, but when he caught the gleam of Selina's eyes his own underwent a change of light.

"Well, you have fastened the deed on him, have you?" said the woman.

"Why, yes. They found a knife where Red Mart died, and I guess that is enough."

The figure of Selina seemed to increase in stature.

"What are you going to do?"

"That is for the court. We stop here."

Selina looked at her brother a moment in silence, and then said hotly:

"Who placed the knife where it was found? Who carried out that part of the programme?"

The boss of Ragged Robin seemed to lean toward his sister, and after a mad look his hand fell upon her shoulder.

"Look here, woman," he said. "Why is it that you are never satisfied? Why is it that you can't keep your fingers out of my games? Haven't I made you princess of the Black Mesa? Haven't I given you a home where you are everybody's equal? You must not come between me and this play. You must not say 'stop' when I am playing out a game that is near my heart."

For a moment it seemed as if Selina would fly at him and sink her hands into his face, but she stood still, and even seemed to meet his words with a smile.

"What is Stirrup Steve to you?" demanded Jack.

A sudden flush suffused the face of The Count's sister, but it vanished almost instantly.

"Never mind that," she said. "You are going to send an innocent man to the noose."

"You want him saved, then?"

"I have not said so. I want the guilty punished."

The nabob drew off a pace and glared at her.

"I guess I'll send you back to Chiquita," he said at last, watching like a hawk the effect of his words. "They want you there, you know. Yes, you will go back in the morning. I will send an escort to the frontier, and Doodles will be your companion from there on."

He seemed to know Selina's feelings toward the half-breed boy, for he laughed when he named him, and in an instant the woman's face was at his breast, and her hand struck him across the face, reddening it until it seemed to bleed.

"I hate the young mixed-blood. He is a spy. He watches both of us when we know it not, and you have brought to the palace a serpent that some day will sting you to death. He is more to be dreaded than the Camp Spiders of whom you—"

The Count threw up one hand and broke her sentence.

"If what you are saying is true, keep back the words you are about to speak," he said, sternly. "You have hated nearly everybody ever since you came into the world. If you will promise to keep quiet I won't send you back to Chiquita."

"But you will hang Stirrup Steve?"

"The court will."

"Then you will send me back, but I won't promise to keep still there."

"You won't, eh?"

"I have spoken."

Selina started toward the door, but his hand detained her.

"What will you do if the court hangs Steve?" he demanded.

"I will tell on you," she hissed. "I will open my mouth and talk."

"By heavens, woman, I believe you love this man."

Again the blush came to the face of Selina and she stopped and looked him in the eye.

"I love him. I love Stirrup Steve as woman never loved man. I would die for him—"

"You? Ha, ha, ha," laughed the boss of Ragged Robin. "Don't you know that he might not be willing to do the same for you?"

"I don't care. I know what you think. I know that you have thrown him into the grip of the Camp Spiders to get him out of your way. Do you think the girl, Alta, will ever come to you and give you her hand? Answer me that, Jack Jargo?"

He laughed again.

"I know that you can't ensnare the man for whose life you plead," he said. "You can't win the love of Stirrup Steve. There are others in Ragged Robin who would come to you with love and money. There are twenty men who would like to lead you to the altar, and some day you may want a defender."



Selina's face grew red.

"And you?" she cried, suddenly covering him with her hand. "What will you need one of these days? Where is the man who came to Ragged Robin nearly a year ago? Where is Joshua Meeks, the stranger who was looking for his child—the man who fell into the trap you set for him? And you stand there and tell me that I may need a defender some day! Think of yourself; or, do you trust in the men with whom you have surrounded yourself? Is the web accounted strong enough to shield you against the vengeance of the future? Do you think that the other child left behind by Joshua Meeks will not find his trail and take vengeance? Look to the web you have woven; don't threaten me."

She was at the door again, but this time he did not stop her. He looked into the face she exhibited and saw triumph there.

"You may turn Stirrup Steve over to the merciless court of Ragged Robin, but there will come a day of reckoning, for the hand of vengeance even now hovers over you."

"Do you mean that the boy up-stairs is a spy against me? Do you intimate that the young half-blood I have taken is against us, and in some one's pay?"

Selina looked back at him, but did not speak.

"Do you think I am in danger by that growler Phocion?" continued Jack. "I can crush him in a moment. He is ready at all times to talk too much. He intimates that the boy—Eagle Ned—vanished in the depths of the Red Rattlesnake Mine, and you know what he means by that. I can crush this talker in an instant, I say."

"Then, for your sake, crush him."

That was Selina's last sentence; she gave Jack another look and went out.

"I will if that is what she really means," muttered the nabob. "The web will catch this fly in red, and put him out of the way. Stirrup Steve is in the coils and he sha'n't escape to bother me in my play for the girl at the cabin. The sting of the Camp Spider is death, and if Selina gets too smart on my hands, by the eternal! she shall go hence never to return."

All this time crouched on the dark stairway of that house, and with ears wide open was a figure which never stirred. It seemed one of the shadows of the place, but it had a pair of blazing eyes and when Selina emerged from the room they saw her and a smile stole over the watchful face.

By and by the figure moved and went up the flight. It turned into the room occupied by the half-breed boy, and there in the darkness he threw his hands to his head and cried out:

"Thank Heaven, I am on the trail at last!"

## CHAPTER IX.

### PHOCION GOES DOWN A ROPE.

THE big miner with the red beard, Alta's friend under all circumstances, Phocion, the true and courageous, did not like the forced restraint put upon his tongue by the paper found on the girl's window sill. He did not like to silence himself when he believed that Eagle Ned had fallen into the web of the Camp Spiders at whose head he thought was Jack Jargo, "The Count."

If he could only get into the tunnel and see for himself; if he could but pass beyond the door of stone which had closed on the boy, he would be satisfied, and if he did not find him there, then he would be willing to draw some of the suspicion from the men who were under his ban.

But how to get into the walled-up tunnel? That was the perplexing question.

In his dilemma Phocion bethought himself of Nixy, the supposed simple, if not, crazy, man of Ragged Robin, and shortly after leaving Alta's home he ran across him.

Nixy had heard of the killing of Red Mart and of the arrest of Stirrup Steve for the crime. He shook his head when Phocion asked him if he believed the young man guilty, and that was as far as he would go.

"You've been everywhere, Nixy," said the red-beard. "You ought to know how the earth looks underneath Ragged Robin."

"I know," grinned the one-eyed man, his single optic glowing with delight.

"But you don't know how to get to the Devil's Tunnel only by way of the mine."

Nixy looked at Phocion as if he thought he was being drawn into some sort of trap, but when he found that the red-beard was in earnest he came closer and lowered his voice.

"I know another road to it. I am the only living person who knows it and I have never told any one."

Here was the very information Phocion wanted, but would Nixy consent to give it to him?

The meeting ended in the one-eyed agreeing to take Phocion to the secret trail and not long afterward they were going toward the mountain.

Some distance from the mouth of the mine the madman raised a large stone disclosing an opening in the earth and looking up into Phocion's face he told him that by dropping fifty feet he would land on a level with the floor of the tunnel.

"I'll go down," said the red-beard. "But when were you there last?"

"Not for more than a year," was the reply, "and see, Captain Phocion, no one has come up out of this hole for the soil hasn't been disturbed."

Phocion had already noticed this and his heart for a moment sunk within him. But he repeated his resolve to go into the tunnel though he did not disclose his motive.

Nixy ran back to camp and procured a long rope which was strong enough to bear the miner's weight and he saw the body of Phocion go down into the gaping hole.

Obedient the miner, Nixy drew off to watch for his return, and with his nerves on tension, Phocion went hand over hand down the cord and stopped at last on a stone floor.

He found himself in a tunnel which was full of foul air against which he had provided before descending, and in a little time he was groping along the wall on his right, now and then feeling near the ground as if in search of something supposed to be there.

All at once Phocion stopped with a cry and stood still. His feet had touched something.

"It is Eagle Ned, just as I suspected," he said to himself. "I have found the boy."

Filled with emotion, the red-beard leaned against the wall, not strong enough to strike a light, and look at the object lying at his feet.

At last he stooped again and put down his hand. It touched a beard as rough as his own.

"This isn't Ned after all!" he cried. "The tunnel is inhabited by a dead man."

His match showed him the face which had startled Eagle Ned, and holding it near the eyes he gazed at the strangely preserved face of the victim of a crime.

"What have I seen a face like this one?" said Phocion. "There is something familiar about it. Hol! it is the face of the man who drifted into Eagle Buttes when I was there, nearly a year ago. He said he was looking for a missing child and I remember how they laughed at him and gave him shelter, believing him a man somewhat out of his head. This is the same face—I know it is."

Phocion inspected the whole length of the tunnel and wound up in front of the stone wall which the hands of some one unknown to him had built.

"The mine is out yonder," said he. "This is the door the trowels of the Camp Spiders made. This is a mystery, sure enough. Eagle Ned did not have a rope when he came to the mine with The Count, but he isn't here and the mouth of the tunnel is walled up."

The more Phocion tried to solve the mystery the deeper it grew and he at last gave it up in despair.

By and by he went back to the man lying in the dark and once more looked down into his face. He looked into his pockets, but found nothing. He had not seen the stranger in camp and did not know before that in his wanderings he had come to Ragged Robin. When he discovered the dagger wound in the neck he felt that the hand which had killed Lazarus and Red Mart also finished this person.

Phocion went up the rope by the help of the wall and appeared suddenly to Nixy on the watch. The one-eyed man had seen no one and the coast being clear they returned to camp.

When Nixy asked Phocion how he liked the Devil's Tunnel, the latter shook his head but said nothing.

The mystery of the dead man whose grave was the tunnel itself was as deep as ever and when Phocion went back to his cabin he sat down and thought over his adventure.

At last he put out the light, but did not go to bed.

"I can't get the dead man in the tunnel out of my head," he muttered. "He was killed for something. When I saw him in Eagle Buttes he was as poor as Lazarus, though he said he was richer than they supposed; but we thought that meant nothing."

There came toward the shanty from the street a figure that had the gliding motions of a panther. It was, however, the figure of a man, and as it neared the shanty, it crept along the

ground unseen as yet by Phocion, who was seated in the dark trying to solve what to him was an impenetrable puzzle.

Nearer and nearer to the door glided the figure.

In one hand, firmly clutched, and lying along the sleeve of a dark coat, lay a knife, the blade of which was so well hidden that it reflected no light from the stars. It was drawn back as if for a blow, and when the other hand of the man touched the latch of Phocion's door, he wound his fingers about the hilt of the blade with more firmness than before.

Just then the red-beard heard a sound, the first one telling him that some one was outside.

He rose and crossed the floor, but the next moment there was a loud report and something fell against the door, and seemed to sink to the ground beneath it.

Startled by the shot, Phocion ran to the portal and opened it.

In the starlight lay the figure of a man, a man with a mask over his face, and Phocion, standing there and looking down at the form, felt that his life had been saved.

No one came forward to acknowledge the shot; no person ran up to see how true it had been, and though Phocion looked and listened, nothing rewarded him.

He bent over the man and lifted the mask. Then he saw the knife gripped by hands that would never wield it again, and looking up he silently thanked his unknown friend.

"It is Durango Dave," said Phocion. "He came hither with evil intent. They want my blood and—"

He looked across the Plaza, and saw three men running toward the shanty. They seemed to have emerged from Black Burt's, and he saw that they were men attached to Jack Jargo and his fortunes.

"What is this?—a dead man at your door, Phocion?" they cried, halting before the red-beard, who looked at them with an expression of amazement.

"You see him as I found him just now. It is Durango Dave. Some one shot him, and he fell where he lies, with the knife in his hand."

The three looked at one another astonished, and then at the man so quiet on the ground.

"Are you sure you don't know who shot him?" one of them asked.

"I don't know. I was inside when I heard the shot, and when I came out I saw no one."

"That's a queer story, don't you know, Phocion?"

"It is the truth."

The lips of the speaker shut hard and emphatically behind his words.

The three turned and went back toward the saloon, leaving Phocion alone with the dead. The miner seemed to know what that silent return meant. They would come again, and there would be more of them. They were Durango Dave's friends; they hated him (Phocion), and they would not let any one believe, not if they could help it, the story he had told of the shooting at his door.

What should he do? He might flee to the mountains and escape the charge and arraignment which he felt would surely come, but that would be the act of a coward, and Alta would be left alone.

When Phocion looked again toward Black Burt's, he saw fully twenty men advancing across the Square. He eyed them without a quiver; not a muscle moved in fear.

When they came up and looked at the man at his feet, their leader said:

"We arrest you for the murder of Durango Dave."

## CHAPTER X.

### THE TRAP THAT CAUGHT—NOTHING.

RAGGED ROBIN laughed at the defense Phocion made.

The Count who heard of the arrest soon after it had been effected, came out of the palace and looked at the prisoner who had been escorted to the bar-room and arraigned for instant trial.

Stirrup Steve was not forgotten in the new events, and when the Spiders of Ragged Robin surged into the saloon and looked at the calm Phocion standing against the bar covered by half a dozen revolvers, they were not long demanding his life.

Presently there appeared at the open door a face which was seen by half a dozen miners at once. It was the face of Alta and when she saw Phocion environed by the toughs and realized that with him she would lose a firm friend, she almost sunk to the ground.

"Escort the girl back," whispered Jack, to his nearest neighbor who went forward, but Alta



had entered the room and was making her way toward the condemned.

"I will answer for the innocence of Phocion," said she, facing the mob for a moment. "He says he did not kill Durango Dave and I know he did not."

"You know it, eh, girl? Prove it."

Alta seemed taken aback at this. She had seen nothing of the shooting and realized that her words would not go far unless substantiated. Color left her cheeks and she turned to The Count whose eye she caught.

"You must go home, Alta," said Jack, in kindly tones. "This is no place for you."

"Will you let Phocion go?"

"Yes, when he proves his innocence."

The eyes of the prisoner seemed to flash as he turned his gaze upon the man who had spoken. They stood face to face and while Phocion looked he thought of the dead man in the tunnel. It was on his lips to ask the nabob if he knew how that body came there, but he held his tongue.

"You are not guilty, Phocion?" cried Alta. "Let me hear from your own lips that you did not kill Durango Dave."

"Girl, I never killed any one," said the red-beard solemnly. "Before Heaven, I will swear it," and his bronzed hand went up and he sent a calm look toward the ceiling.

"Won't you believe it now?" and Alta looked at the mob. "Won't you believe what Phocion swears to? None of you saw him shoot Durango Dave. The man was found dead at Phocion's door with a dagger in his hand. What took him thither? Was it a mission of peace? You do not answer me. Men of Ragged Robin, you cannot."

The mien of the young girl seemed to abash some of the roughs of the camp. They looked at one another and their rage seemed to fade when the voice of Jack was heard.

"The man must prove his innocence," he said. "He must show that he did not shoot Durango Dave."

"He will show it if you will give him time."

Phocion confirmed with a nod the answer Alta had given.

"I will prove it. Give me time, and I will prove to the satisfaction of all that the blood of the dead is not on my hands."

"How much time?"

"Twenty-four hours."

The Count silently consulted the faces before him and said:

"We will give you ten."

"Take it, Captain Phocion," cried Alta. "Take it and I will help you."

"I accept," said the red-beard. "It is all the time you will give me, but I take it."

"The man is free," answered the nabob. "He will have the freedom of the camp, but if he attempts to quit it he will be killed on sight. The man who killed Durango Dave is in Ragged Robin. Find him for us if you can."

The Count's look told Phocion that he was not expected to be successful, and as he turned to go out, with Alta looking up into his face, the brow of Jack Jargo grew dark, and he soon followed the pair.

"Well, you have let the wolf go," said Selina, when the nabob entered the palace and appeared suddenly to her. "You have given him the knife that will cut your thread of life."

"How, woman?" demanded Jack.

"Don't you see that the enemy of the Spiders killed Durango Dave? Can't you see also that Phocion will leave no stone unturned in his search for the slayer? I told you to crush this man who talks so much, but instead a man, one of your men, falls dead at his door. This is the beginning of the end."

"Pish! I hold the camp under my hand. I have but to press it down to crush all who are not with me."

"What are you going to do with Stirrup Steve?"

"I have told you before. He is in the hands of the court. Don't think that because you think something of him I am going to let him slip out of the toils."

The look Selina gave Jack was as dark as night, but she did not speak.

"Where is the boy?" suddenly asked The Count.

Selina glanced toward Doodles's room ere she retired and Jack was alone.

Entering a chamber to the right of the hall he touched a bell which sent its clear tones throughout the house and in a little while there were footsteps on the steps. Jack watched the door and when it opened admitting the figure of the half-breed boy with the queer name, the gaze of the mountain nabob fell upon him.

"You have heard, eh, Doodles?" said Jack. "You know that another man is dead?"

The boy nodded.

"You know that Phocion the man who growls is in the toils. We have given him ten hours in which to find the person who killed Durango Dave, but the time will baffle him. He can't find the killer, Doodles, because it was his own work."

The youth said nothing. He was looking at the handsome man at the table and appeared to see something in Jack's face he had not noticed before.

"Doodles," suddenly said Jack, "which way does the trail leading from the main Comanche camp run?"

It was a trap to catch the boy—a trick to test the truthfulness of the story he had told on coming to Ragged Robin.

The face of the boy did not quiver. He looked into the eyes of the man before him and answered promptly.

"If you would travel it and never quit it you would reach the cold lakes of the north," he said.

"It runs north eh?" laughed Jack. "That's true, I guess. You used to have fine times in camp?"

"Fine times with the Comanche boys of my own age."

"Who was chief then?"

"Old Colchise."

"And his son's name?"

"Colchise had no son."

Under his mustache Jack Jargo seemed to bite his lips.

"I guess that'll do, Doodles," he replied and as the boy turned away he suddenly struck the table and cried out:

"Just a minute. They say you haven't talked Comanche since coming to Ragged Robin. Give me a little of the lingo."

For a moment the face of Doodles paled, and the cunning questioner seemed to score a triumph.

But the next moment a war-whoop rung through the room, and Doodles was hurling at him a lot of choice Indian invectives which nearly lifted Jack's hair.

"By Jove! you'll do," he said. "I guess you're as good as a full-blooded Indian."

The boy bounded from the room and ran upstairs. When he entered his room he stopped, and threw one hand to his heart, as if some sudden stroke was about to send him to the floor.

"I don't want any more of that," he said. "That man has the cunning of a fox and his trap was set to catch a fool."

As for Jack, he was looking into the face of his sister who had appeared unable to account for the wild whoop which she had heard.

"I was only testing the boy," smiled Jack. "That whoop was a genuine Comanche yell, and I don't wonder that it frightened you, as you've heard something like it before now."

Selina colored and then turned white.

"Are you satisfied with your test?" she queried.

"I ought to be. I thought Old Colchise and his band had burst into the room."

"Well, I've been robbed," said Selina.

"Robbed? Robbed of what?"

"One of the pearls has been taken from the necklace."

She came forward, drawing from her bosom a necklace of pearls which she extended, and Jack took it from her hands.

"One is missing. I have counted them a hundred times since it came into my possession. I counted them a week ago, and lately I brought it back from the mine and deposited it in my cabinet. I have been robbed."

"But by whom?"

A spark of fire seemed to dart from the eyes that looked down into the nabob's face.

"Why not by that young serpent up-stairs?" cried Selina. "I tell you he is a spirit of evil. He has been out and on your trail when you thought him asleep in his nest. I believe he has opened the cabinet and robbed me."

"I think not. I don't believe Doodles would do a thing of that kind. I—"

"You don't? Let me go up and face him. I don't like one hair of his head. Let me search his room."

"No," said Jack firmly. "Whatever you do, you sha'n't do that."

Selina gave him another look, and replacing the necklace, swept from the room in towering rage. Doodles had had another narrow escape.

#### CHAPTER XI.

##### THE REVEALMENT.

WHEN Phocion walked from the saloon with

ten hours of grace before him, he was silent and thoughtful.

The mystery connected with the shooting of Durango Dave was one which he could not solve. It told him that he had a friend in camp, but who was he?

The miner went home and shut himself up in his cabin. He had ten hours in which to find the slayer of his intended assassin, and knew that they had been granted by the Camp Spiders because they thought his hunt would be fruitless.

He wondered what Alta thought. The girl believed him innocent of the charge of murder, but she was nearly powerless to afford him any assistance, and the outlook was very dark. Still Phocion did not despair, but when he looked the situation fairly in the face, he was compelled to acknowledge that it was not very promising.

He was not long discovering that a watch had been set on his shanty, that he was under the espionage of some keen eyes, and he knew what it meant. He was to be baffled in his search for the slayer, and the Spiders had marked him for a victim.

Suddenly a strange noise came to his ears, and springing to the back part of the hut, Phocion placed his ear close to the logs.

For a moment he heard nothing, then a slight noise attracted his attention, and he saw a hand appear between two logs where the plastering was scant.

In the hand was a bit of paper which the miner seized with alacrity, and as the hand vanished he turned to his lamp and read as follows:

"Come to the old Cat's-paw Mine as soon as you read this. Don't delay a moment; it is important."

Phocion looked up with a puzzled expression of countenance. What did it mean? Was it a trap set for him by his enemies, and was he to feel the deadly sting of the Spiders in the heart of the old bonanza?

"I will go, come what may," said the red-beard. "I will see who is at the bottom of this conspiracy, and if they are there, they shall have a desperate fight for victory."

Phocion armed himself and set out. He thought he had avoided the bronzed tigers on his track, and in a little time found himself in the mine mentioned by the writer of the mysterious note. He had been there before. Once he had owned some shares in the Cat's-paw, but they had yielded him nothing, and he had let them go.

All at once Phocion fell back against the dark wall and, revolver in hand, listened for a repetition of the sound which had greeted his ears.

"Phocion?" said a voice.

The red-beard started forward, for there was a familiar sound to the voice.

In another moment he was almost thrown backward by the surprise he received.

"I can't hide myself any longer, Phocion," continued the person who had spoken. "I would do wrong to hide from a friend like you."

"Eagle Ned!" cried the old miner, and then he stopped, fearing that he had spoken a name which he should have kept back.

But in the light of the little torch which had been stuck into a crevice in the wall he was looking into the face of Doodles, the half-breed boy. The face of Doodles, but the eyes and voice of Eagle Ned! It was a startling revelation.

For a moment the youth smiled at the miner's surprise and then drew nearer, saying in his old tones:

"I have been playing it on you, Phocion, all this time. I have been playing spy in the web of the Spiders, but the time has come for me to declare myself."

"You must be careful; but, pshaw! a boy who can play it on Jack Jargo need not be advised. You have been dead to me for days. How did you get out of the Devil's Tunnel?"

Eagle Ned, as we may call him once more, smiled and laid his hand on Phocion's sleeve.

"It was by the skin of my teeth and just in time," he said. "When I found him, I mean the man who inhabits the tunnel, I was nearly ready to succumb to the foul air of the dismal hole, but with a great effort I managed to run forward and reached the mouth of the tunnel just in time to save my own life. I fell forward and on the outside of the opening, and after awhile made my way from the mine. I knew that I was believed to be in the tunnel by the man whom I followed to the spot. I was the companion of the dead, and, to all intents and purposes, dead myself. What was to be done? To go back and tell what I had discovered would be to draw the web of Spiders about me and fall a victim to the sting of the clan. I was resolved to turn half-breed. This was not so difficult a



transformation as you might think, Phocion. Long ago I spent some months with the friendly Comanches and learned much about them. I went to the mountain and cut my own hair. I dyed my skin, already almost dark enough for my purpose, and came back Doodles, the child of the lodge.

"I was afraid to encounter you and Alta, neither did I like to look Stirrup Steve in the face for he has such keen eyes, but after awhile I mustered up courage enough for the play in hand and threw my first card. To my joy and surprise I was unrecognized. Not only that, but I became an inmate of The Count's house and fell under Selina's ban just as I thought I would. That woman has the nature of a tigress. More than once, when she thought me sound asleep, I have seen her bending over me, the eyes that shine in her head brighter than ever and her fingers wound around the hilt of a long dagger. She is an outcast. Some years ago she was banished from Chiquita, a town across the border, for a crime which would not have prevented her from finding a noose and a handy tree. I have heard Jack who knows all about the murder threaten to send her back to justice."

"It's a wonder Selina did not suspect you," said the listening Phocion.

"I half-believe she did. When Jack himself catechised me and asked me to give him a specimen of the Comanche language, I was stumped for a second, and thought the *expose* had come. But I gave him what I knew, for I had caught some words from the Indians during my stay among them, and to my great relief it satisfied him. But the next minute Selina came in and accused me of robbing her of one of the pearls of a wonderful necklace she has in her possession."

"Not to your face, Ned?"

"No. She wanted to come up-stairs and search my room. The pearl was even then on my person, as it is now. She might have found it and she might not. I would probably have swallowed it, for I listened on the stair and heard the talk between her and Jack."

Eagle Ned drew from his bosom a little leathern pocketbook, which he opened in Phocion's presence, and in a moment the eyes of the miner were gazing at the pearl mentioned by the boy. He took it in his hand and examined it closely in the light of the torch, then looked at Ned for an explanation.

"I have not been idle, Phocion. I know who owned that necklace once. It encircled the neck of my baby sister."

"This necklace, boy?" cried Phocion. "You must be out of your head."

"Not quite that far gone," smiled the boy. "I have not picked up any misleading clues. I have kept my eyes and ears open in the house of the nabob. I have looked in certain places when neither Jack nor his tiger sister were in. I have found the note-book of the man who lies dead in the Devil's Tunnel."

"Where did you find it?"

"In the palace. It was hidden away and had never been destroyed. It tells a strange story, so strange that I wondered if it could be true, while I read it in the secret parts of the mines. Joshua Meeks tells the story of a child strangely stolen years ago. It must have been a long time since, for there is nothing to fix the date exactly. He constituted himself a trailer and set out to find the lost one. He noted down the incidents of his quest until a few days before the date which I found in the hand of the dead man in the tunnel. This sounds like a romance, eh, Phocion?"

"I am ready to believe anything now," was the miner's answer. "Go on."

"Joshua Meeks had on his person when he came to this region the necklace which I found in Selina's room, and from which I took the pearl in your hand now. No one seems to have seen the child-hunter in Ragged Robin: he must have been discovered by his foe before any one could meet him, and he went to the tunnel and died. My sister had a necklace just like this one. Mother has told me so a thousand times, and it has been the main clue of my quest. I did not want to rob Selina of the whole necklace; that would have thrown me at once into the web and exposed me and my escape from the tunnel which, shortly after I left it, was walled up by The Count's men."

For some time after Eagle Ned's story Phocion looked down into the face revealed by the light and then said:

"You know the situation I am in. You must know, coming from the very web of the Spiders, as you do, that I have ten hours in which to unearth the slayer of Durango Dave."

"It shall be done within the given time," said

Eagle Ned. "Don't let that bother you, Phocion."

"Do you know who did the deed? It saved my life and I owe the shooter a great deal."

It seemed to the red-beard of Ragged Robin that a smile came to the eyes of the youth and that he looked wise as he regarded him.

"Let us combine to break the power of the Camp Spiders," continued Ned. "I am on the trail of the lost and with the pearl in my possession something tells me that I am not far from triumph."

"Do you believe your sister lives?"

"Why not?"

"I knew the time when you accounted her dead."

"That is true. Behind the mask of the nabob, behind the life of his tiger sister, lies the secret. It is dangerous work, I know. If I am suspected of being Eagle Ned by Jack and his Spiders, my life won't be worth that," and the boy snapped his fingers in Phocion's face.

"Then, for heaven's sake, be cautious," was the response. "If I am in the shadow of death, I have found you again and am happy."

## CHAPTER XII.

### A JUMP FOR LIFE.

EAGLE NED, no longer Doodles, went back to the palace.

He entered the house with feelings which had not animated his bosom before. He stopped a moment on the stair and listened, but heard nothing.

"The lair of the tiger seems deserted," said he to himself. "I don't see the eye of the tigress, nor hear the laugh of the man with the ten mines. Captain Jack could not have retired, for on a night of this kind he would not sleep, but, cat-like, would be wide awake waiting for an opportunity to send his claws into the throat of some victim."

The boy spy passed to his room and stood at the window awhile.

He did not know that he had been followed, but a form stealing across the Plaza that very moment told that he had been seen.

Presently Eagle Ned heard the shutting of a door and there came up the steps a footfall not quite light enough to escape his keen ears.

Throwing himself hastily on the couch he feigned slumber and saw a figure human in outlines glide into the chamber. It crossed the floor and came toward him.

That it was the figure of Selina he saw at once and when she stopped and bent over him with fire in her eyes, he trembled for his own safety.

"The tigress is here for a purpose," thought the boy. "She may be looking for the lost pearl, but I guess it is safe enough—for the present, at least."

Selina passed her silken hand underneath the boy's pillow, but found nothing. She then looked through the clothes he had discarded, but with the same result.

He heard her breathing hard while she searched; he saw how intense was the gleam of her tigerish eyes, and felt that the slightest movement would seal his doom.

At last Selina rose and looked at him. For a moment she stood over him resembling a vulture about to pounce upon a victim, but all at once she swept from the room.

When she had departed Eagle Ned sprang from his couch and ran to the door. She was at the bottom of the steps and was talking to a man there.

I could not help coming to-night, however late the hour. You may not thank me for what I know, but I have news for you, Selina. I have made a discovery."

"What is it, Redbolt?"

"It is about the boy you an' Jack have been sheltering all along. You don't know who you've got in the house."

There was a moment's silence during which the heart of the boy overhead seemed to stand still.

"What do you know about him? Out with it."

Selina was impatient.

"He's Eagle Ned."

"That boy?"

"That very boy," was the emphatic answer. "I know, for I saw enough to-night to convince me."

"What did you see?"

"I saw him and Phocion go down to a mine, one at a time. The boy went first. I followed Phocion, pulling my boots at the door, an' when I entered a cricket could not have heard me. I heard the whole story of the boy's hunt for the lost sister. It was Ned's story to a dot—the

same one we used to hear in the saloon. Have you missed anything?"

Selina must have started, from the exclamation that fell from her lips.

"How do you know I have?" she cried. "Who told you that I have been robbed?"

"I have listened to the robber's confession."

"Did the boy do it?"

"Eagle Ned, or Doodles, as you call him, took the pearl. Why? Because he thinks it came from the necklace once worn by his sister."

In the stillness that followed this revelation Ned thought that the very floor was sinking beneath him.

"I thank you, Redbolt. You have brought something important. I will attend to the rest."

The man seemed to linger at the door.

"You'll think something of me now, won't you, Selina?" he queried.

"Yes, yes; only go away and let me attend to the rest."

"Good-night," spoke the miner and the door was shut.

Eagle Ned realized the peril that menaced him. He knew that the exposure had come, that he was unmasked at last, for Redbolt had told the truth, though he could hardly believe that he and Phocion had been shadowed to the mine.

He drew back and closed his door softly. He locked it and crossed the room. Outside there were many shadows and the figure of Redbolt had vanished across the Square.

"It is out of the web and fight, or remain and perish like a rat in a trap," he said. "Outside I will have a chance, but here none at all."

He raised the sash and looked down at the ground. It did not seem far, indeed it was but a few feet, but a jump was risky, still something desperate had to be done. Eagle Ned could imagine the tigress body of Selina stealing up the stairs to carry out her latest resolve; he thought he heard her silken footfalls, and all at once he crawled over the sill and hung for an instant along the house.

Letting his hold go, Eagle Ned dropped to the ground and alighted safely. Falling back, he caught his breath and waited to see if his escape had been discovered. No sound broke the silence following the jump for life. He looked across the Plaza and saw the lights in Black Burt's den; heard the sounds of the playing there, and saw at last the tall, well known figure of Jack come out and go toward the palace.

Eagle Ned sprang from the shadow of the house and ran off. He looked back at the death-trap, but saw nothing of Selina.

In another minute he was at the door of Phocion's shanty. A rap was not answered; the old miner in the web was not in.

Ned turned and looked toward Alta's house. He saw it silent among the shadows of the street, and then bounded thither. The girl came to the door, her face white and startled, but something seemed to tell her who her visitor really was.

"Alta, I am Eagle Ned."

The girl uttered a slight cry.

"You have been Doodles. Your voice has sounded familiar to me, and I have even thought that you might be Ned. What is the matter? Are you hunted?"

"I have been unmasked by Redbolt and Selina knows the secret. That means that it will soon be in the hands of the Camp Spiders. They will look not for Doodles now, but for Eagle Ned, and my hunt will end if they find me before I am ready to strike."

"You ready to strike in this nest of villains?" said Alta, bending over the boy and catching his eye as if she did not believe him more than half sane.

"I am going to strike. There is much to be done. Stirrup Steve must be taken out of the shadow of the noose, Phocion is there, too, and you, Alta, are marked for a life which would age you long before your time."

"That I already know, for Captain Jack has played his first card, though I met it as bravely as I could."

"I don't want to get you into trouble, Alta. I won't. There are hiding-places where I will be safe—places safer for me than the Devil's Tunnel. Keep the secret of my identity, though it will not be a secret long in Ragged Robin. I will have the camp against me. It is under hand of the Count—"

"Not all of it," interrupted the girl. "I don't know what has passed within the last hours, else you would not have said that. This is mutiny at last—mutiny against the rule of the



nabob. The men who don't want to see the Camp Spiders sting them to death have met and planned; but it is an unequal fight. They are still in session."

"Where?" eagerly asked the boy.

"In the heart of Prince Phil's mine—the Merry Mixer."

Ned drew back.

"You may be seen going thither. They will have sentinels out, and as Doodles, you will not be allowed to approach the spot."

"But I am Doodles no longer."

"I know that, but before you could tell them so the deed might be done, and the sentinels would feel that they had killed a spy."

Eagle Ned assured Alta that he was able to take care of himself, and five minutes later he was creeping through the shadows of the shanties to the mine she had named.

He knew where the Merry Mixer was. He knew all the trails leading to the mines that made money for the toughs of Ragged Robin, and when he found himself near the mouth of the one he sought, he avoided the dark figure that patrolled it and glided into the depths of the old bonanza.

Down the corridor went the flitting figure of the boy spy.

He was looking for the meeting-place of the mutineers, and when he stopped and listened to hear the hum of voices, he felt that Alta had not guided him wrong.

A glimmer of light ahead showed the boy the group of stern men who were resolving not to submit to the rule of the man with a dark past. It was worth their very lives to meet there and talk against the nabob of Ragged Robin. He owned ten mines, and the men who worked them and piled gold-dust at his feet were his slaves, and some of them were the deadly Spiders of the Black Mesa.

Eagle Ned crept on and crouched just without the rim of light thrown out by the torch. He bided his time. He saw the men at work, heard their curses against the boss of the camp, and when he heard the name of Doodles mentioned as included in the list of enemies of law and order, he sprang forward and halted in their midst.

Twenty revolvers clicked around him; as many hands were thrust out to jerk him within a circle of death when, throwing up his hand, he cried out:

"I am Eagle Ned! I hold the secret which more than condemns the nabob of the camp!"

The next instant every revolver had dropped.

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### A FRIGHTENED TOUGH.

THE mutineers of the Black Mesa looked at one another as if in doubt of the truthfulness of the youth's assertion.

It did not seem possible to them that Doodles was Eagle Ned, Phocion's *protege*. The boy had been missing so long and they had heard the miner's fears so often, that they were inclined to believe that a mine of deception had been sprung upon them and that the boy had been sent among them by Jack Jargo for the purpose of finding out their plans and identity.

But the boy was ready to prove his declaration and in a moment, as it were, had established it to the satisfaction of all.

He narrated his adventures in the Devil's Tunnel and the last doubters believed, and by the time Ned had reached the end of his narrative he was the hero of the hour.

What if they were watched? What if some spy attached to The Count's fortunes had followed Ned to the mine and had sneaked into it, as he had done?

But the utmost scrutiny showed nothing of this and the mutineers went back to the plans interrupted by the youth's arrival.

There was a stern determination on the part of the men to break the hold of the nabob on the camp. They realized now that Jack was at the head of the Camp Spiders and that, unless their grip was soon broken, not only Phocion and Stirrup Steve, but others would fall under the deadly dagger.

It was late when the conclave broke up, but Ned did not quit the mine.

The others went out and glided back to their respective cabins there to wait for the signal which was to be sounded the coming day.

Phocion was not among the men who met in the mine. He was at work trying to discover the slayer of Durango Dave on which depended his own existence. The red-beard thought he name could guess the slayer, but he said nothing while him. He saw the allotted time wear away with the mystery unsolved.

Captain Jack had heard of the message brought to the palace by Redbolt, one of Selina's ardent lovers. His sister had met him at the threshold and told him what a serpent they had been harboring, that Doodles had been unmasked and that he had effected his escape.

Jack listened with a strange smile at his lips. "I'll fix him," he said. "I'll attend to this young snake."

"When it is too late," said Selina derisively. "You would not let me search his room, but let him fool you with the Comanche war-whoop. See what has happened. He has discovered all he wants to know."

"But he is powerless," answered Jack. "You forget that the boy is in the midst of a campful of enemies."

"He has Phocion for a friend."

"Phocion is even now in the shadow of death."

"The girl will hide him if she can."

How Selina of the tiger eyes hated Alta, the waif!

"Don't fear on that score," said Jack. "Nothing can save the boy spy. He is as good as out of the way now."

"But he has carried the pearl with him; he took away the one he stole from the necklace."

"You've got enough without it."

Selina looked but said nothing, and the next minute Jack was alone. He glanced at his watch and went out. Passing the door of Black Burt's den he looked in, made a sign and a man came out.

"Look here, Toby," said Jack, facing the fellow whose skin was almost yellow, showing his Greaser blood. "We have unmasked a young spy. We have found out that Doodles is Eagle Ned."

Toby fell back amazed and stared at the face before him.

"No, master. He lies in the Devil's Tunnel."

"We must see. You shall pick a hole through the wall and go down and look for yourself. I didn't more than half believe Selina, but she maintained that Doodles is Eagle Ned. Come!"

The pair went down to the mine, and in a short time Toby was tearing at the wall which had closed the mouth of the tunnel.

Captain Jack stood by and watched the proceedings with much interest. He saw piece after piece of the masonry yield to Toby's skill, and when a hole large enough to admit the body of a man had been made, he motioned for Toby to go in.

Down the tunnel glided the man with the torch. He was soon lost sight of, but Jack saw the gleam of the light and knew that his man was on important ground.

Suddenly a loud cry came from the depths of the tunnel, and in a little while the figure of Toby, hair erect and eyes on the stare, came into view.

He almost fell at the feet of the nabob, and when Jack caught him by the collar and demanded to know what he had seen, he stammered something the camp boss could not understand.

"He is alive!" cried Toby.

"Alive, man? Impossible!"

"I mean the stranger who went into the tunnel nearly a year ago."

Jack's look became a blank stare. He knew this could not be.

"I saw him lying on the ground as natural as when we left him there. If you don't believe it go in and look for yourself."

"But the boy?"

"He isn't in there."

"Be sure of that, Toby."

"I am. I took my eyes with me into the tunnel. I lost sight of nothing."

"But the man we left there can't be living."

The frightened look had by this time left Toby's eyes, and he began to see what a fool he had made of himself. He looked down into the tunnel, and at last volunteered to go back and take another look.

This he did returning soon with another report concerning the tenant of the underground corridor. The man was dead, but the boy was not there and he had gone to the end of the tunnel.

Captain Jack said nothing for a moment.

"I don't see how it can be," said Toby. "You say you heard him fall with a cry?"

"I did."

"I never knew any one to revive after inhaling such deadly gases, though if the boy fell on his face and thus kept them from his lungs, there might be a chance."

"Then he found that chance and saved himself. He is not here, but the other one is."

"The other one will remain."

Toby's trowel went to work again and the

mouth of the tunnel was walled up once more. When this had been done The Count and his man went back. Jack was silent, almost sullen. He seemed troubled over the escape of the boy and did not speak until they had reached Toby's shanty.

"What have you against the boy, captain?" asked the miner, looking at Jack.

These two men had been friends a long time. They had few secrets between each other for danger had linked them together and Toby knew the nabob long before the date of our story.

Captain Jack seemed to think before he answered the man who was eying him like an eagle.

"What have I against him, Toby?" he said at last. "I don't see why it need be a secret from you. That boy will be the doom of both of us if permitted to play out the game he has inaugurated. He is positively dangerous."

"But he's but a boy," sneered Toby.

"A young lion and dangerous because of his youth. He is looking for a sister who was spirited away years ago, almost before he knew her. Toby, did it ever strike you that the man in the Devil's Tunnel might, in a manner, be connected with the fortunes of Eagle Ned?"

Toby shook his head.

"There is a link that unites those two," continued Jack. "You may not see it, but I do."

"Who was that man?"

"A straggler—a man who had roamed all over the country and who had a tale of woe strangely like Eagle Ned's. He was Joshua Meeks; he had been a wanderer for years and was not as poor as he was thought."

"But no gold was found on him."

"You are right; no gold was found on his person. He went to his fate like a sheep to the slaughter-pen. When he died in the heart of the Red Rattlesnake he left behind nothing which the keenest eye of the boy could discover. However, he was the keeper of a secret. He was absolutely rich."

"You never told me this before."

"Because there was no need for telling it," said Jack. "Toby, we have been friends a long time. You have never been rewarded for what service you have given me. Ask for the reward now."

The snake-like eyes of Toby seemed to glitter. He looked at The Count and grinned.

"You won't give me what I ask for," he said.

"Try me."

"Then I'd like to become the husband of Selina."

Captain Jargo laughed. It was not a derisive laugh, but one that told a good deal. He would give his tiger sister to this man; he would make her the bride of Toby, the bronzed slave, and thus keep her under his thumb.

"She is yours, Toby," he said. "Selina from this hour is your affianced."

The man sprang up and seized Jack's hand.

"She might have a say in this," he cried. "But I will bring her around."

"How, Toby?"

"If she refuses me, I will threaten to take her back to Chiquita."

"That will clinch the affair. She will never go back there."

Thus the hand of Selina, the nabob's sister, was bestowed upon the ambitious Toby, but Selina herself was apt to have something to say before the carrying out of the compact.

### CHAPTER XIV.

#### THE START OF A THUNDERBOLT.

WHEN morning came many an eye was turned upon Phocion's shanty, and the Spiders of Ragged Robin wondered what he had discovered, if anything.

His ten hours of grace were nearly up, and the sun, creeping over the granite hills of Arizona, told the men of the camp that Phocion was nearer the noose than he had ever been.

When the tall figure and red beard were seen to emerge from the cabin, the toughs who belonged to the nabob's faction looked at one another and smiled. They saw Phocion come toward Black Burt's saloon like a man walking into a trap, and when he had entered, they surged after him.

Not one thought for a moment that he would defy the camp. What could he do?

It was Phocion against the banded toughs, and they thought that he might surrender, saying that he had been unable to discover the slayer of Durango Dave.

The figure of Phocion halted at the long counter, and he looked at the sea of dark faces before him. If he was looking for a friend, he did



not seem to find him, for there was not a sympathetic face in the whole crowd.

Phocion looked at his watch, and replaced it in the pocket of his buckskin vest.

"My time is not quite up," said he. "But I am ready to tell who killed Durango Dave."

A murmur of surprise ran through the gang and eye met eye in bewildering astonishment.

"He was shot by Doodles," continued the red-beard.

"By Doodles, the half-breed?" cried half a dozen voices.

"By The Count's *protege*," coolly answered Phocion.

"Where is he?"

The tall miner shook his head.

"You don't know, eh, Phocion, and yet you accuse Doodles of the murder of Durango Dave?"

The red beard dropped in acquiescence.

"Who told you that Doodles killed Dave of Durango?"

"Doodles himself."

The whole crowd laughed.

"This is a story fit for the marines!" said the giant who stood at the head of the mob.

"It will do to tell elsewhere, but not here, Phocion. We want proof of what you say. You must produce the culprit or the court will sit."

There was a terrible meaning in the last words. The court of Ragged Robin was Captain Jack's creation; it was as much a creature of his will as the men who composed it. Phocion knew this, but he did not quail at the words he heard.

"I can't produce Doodles and I wouldn't if I could," he suddenly said.

"You wouldn't, eh?"

"I wouldn't!"

How firmly behind the miner's last words shut the lips that had just spoken!

"Gentlemen, I have done my share of the work. You gave me ten hours in which to find the person who killed Durango Dave. I have found him. It is for you to do the rest."

Had Phocion betrayed Eagle Ned to his foes? If he loved the boy, why had he deliberately charged him with this horrid crime? It looked like treachery of the basest sort.

Phocion turned toward the door and walked forward. There was a movement to intercept him, but all at once he wheeled and covered the first rank with a six-shooter. His eyes fairly glittered behind it and while he looked over the shining barrel those who watched him saw death in his mien.

"I am going out," he said. "The man who follows me will never reach the sunlight alive. When you want me at your packed court you will find me ready."

Out of the door went Phocion with the tread of a victor. He was seen to cross the Plaza bending his steps toward the cabin where Stirrup Steve was confined.

"He is going to rescue Steve!" went up from every side.

Phocion did not halt until he reached the door. It was secured on the outside with chain and staple and one of his hands seized the fastenings.

A quick wrench and the lock had been "picked," and those who looked at the defter saw the door thrown open.

"Steve?" called Phocion, and there came out the figure of Alta's friend—the man accused of the murder of Red Mart, the second victim of the Spider's sting.

"This is mutiny of the basest sort," roared a voice, and all saw advancing across the Square the form of Jack Jargo, his hat thrown back, and his long hair dangling in the wind on his shoulders.

"Call it what you will," said Phocion, looking at The Count. "I call it mutiny, too—mutiny against the accursed power of the Camp Spiders. A man can die but once, and if he falls resisting oppression he will have died a victor."

Jack stopped in the midst of the astonished men of the mountain camp. He glared at them with the malignity of a tiger, and then covered Phocion and Stirrup Steve with his hand.

"Forward! Arrest the two traitors!" he cried.

Not a man moved. It might have been the revolver firmly gripped by the dark hand of Phocion that held them back, or it might have been the figure moving with swift strides toward the hut.

All recognized Alta—Alta, the mountain wail. Jack saw the girl and his brow ruffled. She had come between him and his victims once before, and here she was again.

Alta came on with her eyes riveted upon the

two men facing the sullen mob, and when near them she halted and looked toward Jack and the Camp Spiders.

"Neither of those men are guilty," she said. "Their hands are bloodless. In the first place, Red Mart died by the same hand that slew Lazarus."

"Who killed Lazarus?" cried some one in the crowd.

The girl's form seemed to bend forward. She met the eyes of Steve and Phocion and seemed to hesitate.

"The Spiders killed them both," she said at length. "They felt the death sting of the insect, and died in their boots. Those men were marked; each carried on his breast a mark which was that of a band of Vigilantes that lived in a certain camp which had spiders just like Ragged Robin. They wiped out the nest, or thought they did, but they were mistaken. One of the Spiders escaped; he lived through the deadly campaign inaugurated by the Vigilantes. The dagger that slew Red Mart and Lazarus was the dagger of the Spiders of the other mountain camp. It has been transplanted here. Men of Ragged Robin, you are the slaves of the Spider of death; you are the tools of the wretch who would fasten upon the innocent the crime of murder."

There was no reply to these accusations, but all felt that one could have been made.

Alta walked on to the doomed miners, but stopped at the loud voice of Captain Jack.

"What is it, Captain Jargo?" she asked.

Those who looked at The Count saw him throw his hat to the ground and step forward. He looked a perfect Apollo in the sunlight and was the center of interest.

"The court shall sit at once!" he cried. "The tribunal which takes cognizance of these things is convened for immediate session."

A smile of derision seemed to touch the white lips of the wonderfully cool heroine.

"Call the court together," she said.

Captain Jack did so and then turned toward the palace. They all saw him walk back over the Plaza while the crowd, or the largest part of it, went to Black Burt's.

The crisis in the history of Ragged Robin had come. It was the final struggle between the Camp Spiders and their enemies. In the minds of nearly all there could be but one ending of the fight. The Camp Spiders were all-powerful; they had for their chief a man whose cunning and strength were proverbial—a man schooled in the crimes of other camps and the secrets of other trails.

Where was Eagle Ned? The men of the camp must have asked themselves this question while they went away to prepare for the session of the famous tribunal of the Black Mesa. Would he appear again on the scene? Or had he fled, betrayed by Phocion who had taken him in and given him food and shelter?

Alta and Stirrup Steve walked together toward the girl's home thus telling all who saw them that they were more than friends. Dark looks followed the pair, who were followed by Phocion, whose figure seemed to have a loftier stature and in whose eagle eyes shone a look of defiance and coolness.

At the same time a boy was standing in the doorway of a mine the silent spectator, but at a distance from the scenes we have just witnessed.

Eagle Ned had come out of the Merry Mixer and was watching the scenes before him. His eye took in everything; he saw the girl's triumph and watched the form of Jack as it went back to the palace where he had slept in the gleam of Selina's dagger.

When the nabob had closed the door of his house behind him, Eagle Ned went back into the mine and stood for a moment against the wall with shadows on every side.

"I go out to win or lose," he said, solemnly. "The time for the final fight has come. The mutineers may lose courage when the test comes, but I must not. I have played this hand in the very shadow of death. I have spied with the hand of doom over me; I have slept in the nest of the Camp Spider and, my lost sister, all for you! More than this: I have another mission. I told the dead in the tunnel that I would avenge the crime concealed there. Yes, Joshua Meeks, I will do this or perish by the Spiders of the Black Mesa!"

And the uplifted hand of the boy spy fell to his side and he disappeared once more.

## CHAPTER XV.

### A SHOT IN THE BONANZA.

"THE boy is somewhere. I would like to find him," said Captain Jack when he had entered

the palace and faced a man whom he called to him.

"We will find him, captain."

"It must be done."

The man departed and The Count was left alone.

For some time he sat at the table, his face cast in thought and silence in the room.

By and by there stole in the figure of Selina, and the moment the woman saw him she stopped.

"You have given me away, eh?" said Selina.

The Count looked at her and saw a dangerous light in her eyes.

"To be plain, I have found a husband for you," he said at last. "I thought it high time for you to have a master, and so I found one. I have told Toby that you will become his wife."

Selina leaned toward the speaker, with a sinister smile at the corners of her mouth.

"That is all right. You are very kind. Where is this future husband of mine?"

"Do you want to see him?"

"Why not?" smiled Selina. "I would like to see Toby. Shall I go out and find him?"

The nabob of Ragged Robin hardly knew what to say. He did not like Selina's looks. There was something about his sister which boded evil to his plans, and he almost wished that he had not rescued her from the fury of the mob across the border.

"I will find him," she went on. "I will go out and see Toby. But what have you done with the boy who stung you so?"

"He will be in my hands ere long. I will have the whole camp on hunt of him, and he cannot escape."

"When you have found him, what?"

"Never mind that. I will attend to that when we have captured him!"

"It won't be banishment, will it?"

"It will be more than that, but I won't tell you any more now," and with a wave of his hand the boss of the camp dismissed Selina, who reluctantly retired.

The court of the camp came together in the saloon where on more than one occasion previously it had met and passed sentence on some offender. It was composed of men in The Count's service, and all of them had worn the mask of the Camp Spider. These were the men who were to pass sentence on Phocion and Stirrup Steve, and before whom, when caught, Eagle Ned would be brought.

But other events were transpiring in another part of the camp, events destined to have a bearing on the session of the court.

The men sent out to search for Eagle Ned were at work. They had resolved to look through the mines, and remembering the Merry Mixer, a lot of them entered it, and found in the dry dust near the entrance a footprint, which seemed to give them encouragement.

Eagle Ned heard the voices of his hunters and retired deeper into the bonanza. He knew that the cool men of the camp, the merciless followers of the fortunes of Jack Jargo, were at his heels, and it was not the proper time for him to appear on the scene and unmask the man he hated.

The men tracked him into the heart of the old mine and there met for consultation. There were six of them and they knew the interior of the mine pretty well. They had visited it on several occasions and when they found themselves there, they resolved to prosecute the search until success crowned their efforts.

Meanwhile, Ned, lying along a ledge in the dark, was watching the council being held beneath him.

Presently the men started and listened.

"Some one is behind us," said one. "We have been followed. Can it be by the boy himself?"

Ned, too, had heard the footfall which came down the echoing corridor and all at once the figure of a girl burst into the light of the torch in the wall.

It was Alta.

"That is risky, Alta," said Eagle Ned to himself. "I am able to take care of myself and you only run into danger when you come here to warn me of the hunt."

The girl of the camp saw the men before her and suddenly drew back, but too late. She had been seen by all.

"Halt, thar!" cried the leader of the band. "We don't want to hurt you, but you are the very person we want."

The next moment Alta came on and stopped in front of the six.

"Whar's the boy?"

Ned saw the lips of the girl meet resolutely and her eyes seemed to flash.

The hand of the speaker clutched her arm and



the whole six were looking into her face with the malignity of devils."

"You know he is hiding here," said they. "You came to the mine to warn him. Where is he?"

"If I knew I would not tell you," said Alta. "Do you think I would willingly throw Eagle Ned into the jaws of the wolf?"

"We will find him in time, anyhow."

"Find him, then."

"Then, you refuse to help us?"

"I refuse to help you."

The roughs drew back and looked at the girl. They did not know what to make of her coolness and determination.

"Make her tell us," cried one. "She will tell if you twist her wrist or—"

"Here, twist my wrist, coward!" cried Alta, holding out her hand to the man, who recoiled with drooping eyes.

Alta stood before him with her handsome figure drawn to its full height and her face aflame with earnestness. She kept her temper in the midst of it all.

"If they offer her any indignity they will pay for it," said a whispered voice on the ledge in the dark, and the hand of the boy lying there thrust a revolver over the fringe of the place and covered a man who faced Alta.

"He is somewhere in the mine and we will find him," continued the leader of the six.

"When you have found him, what?"

"Oh, we will take him to the tribunal and give him a short trial. He has been playing spy at Captain Jack's heels. He is the Doodles of the palace; he went off as Eagle Ned and came back a half-blood to carry out a game of his own."

"What sort of game?"

"We don't know, but it is against Captain Jack. He pretends to be looking for a sister he lost years ago, but there's more than that behind his hunt."

Alta was taken deeper into the mine by the men, and when they had reached a spot where the trails forked they stopped and faced her again.

"Which trail shall we take?" they asked her.

Alta looked, but did not speak.

"Shall we go to the right or to the left?"

"Choose for yourselves."

"You utterly refuse to show us the way to the boy spy?"

"I don't know it."

The men laughed outright. They did not believe this, yet it was true. Alta did not know where Eagle Ned was, though she had entered the mine to warn him of the danger that menaced. She knew he was there, but in what particular part of the old bonanza he was hidden was a secret to her.

"Throw the girl down the precipice!" said a growler.

"Let her remain here till she manifests a desire to tell what she knows," said another.

Alta looked calmly into the faces by which she was surrounded.

She saw that the Spiders were fast losing patience with what they called her deception. Her life was in danger.

She did not know that feet which the keen ears of the men of Ragged Robin had not heard, were near at hand. She had not heard them herself, but they were near. Eagle Ned, gliding from the place from which he first saw the six, had reached another spot and, revolver in hand, was looking on once more, ready to rescue Alta when the time came from the hands of the tough half-dozen.

The waif of Ragged Robin stood erect; she knew that something tigerish was passing through the minds of the six, that the infamous suggestion to throw her down the dark precipice which lay near her feet might be carried out by the hot-headed men and she was practically helpless in their hands.

All at once the leader of the six laid his hand on Alta's wrist.

"You must disclose the hiding-place of the boy spy," he said madly. "We don't believe that you don't know where he is. That isn't natural. You came hither to warn him against us and you know where he hides at this moment."

The speaker drew Alta toward the edge of the precipice and his companions made way for him.

"Throw her over, Dick, or make her tell the truth."

There was a demon gleam in the eyes that looked at the girl in the toils. Dick stood near the nabob of Ragged Robin; he had served Captain Jack a long time and knew that if the Camp Spiders were successfully encountered by

their enemies their reign would end and he would be among the victims of vengeance.

Suddenly the whole place rung with the loud report of a fire-arm. The man who had seized Alta's wrist fell back and tottered for an instant at the edge of the precipice, but a tough threw him back and saved him from falling over.

"Catch the girl!" cried several voices, but when they sprung toward the waif of the camp she vanished, and the sound of flying footsteps told them that their victim had been rescued by the revolver of an unknown marksman, probably Eagle Ned himself.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### WALKING INTO A TRAP.

THE pursuit of Alta proved fruitless. The men of the camp came back in a rage, and reported to their wounded leader that the girl had vanished beyond their ken, and that she could not be tracked any longer.

"Take me up to the light and we will bring down upon this mine the whole force of Spiders, and rout her out," he said.

They helped him to the sunlight where he stood while they dressed the wound in his arm.

In a short time the whole camp knew about the adventures in the bonanza. Captain Jack looked at his sister, who smiled while she talked, and who said she was really glad the girl had shed some bandit blood.

"What do you mean, Selina?" cried Jack. "You talk as though you had turned against the Spiders of the Black Mesa?"

"And why shouldn't I? I know that Toby, the man to whom you have betrothed me, will send me back to Chiquita if I don't carry out your part of the bargain. He has said as much. I found him as cool and calculating as the most adroit villain that ever lived. Do you think I ought to wish well a lot of men who live for nothing but blood and gold?"

There was no reply, the hands of Captain Jack, The Count, toying with a piece of paper which he had just folded.

"I don't want to go back to Chiquita; I am not going back!" said Selina, still watching him. The nabob brother suddenly looked up.

"A truce to all this!" he cried, snatching his hat from the table. "You and Toby for it."

He was crossing the room when her hand caught him and she whirled him by main strength and looked him in the eye.

"Toby and I for it, you say. I am willing it shall be thus. I am going to play a hand of my own from this time on. I have told you that my heart is given to Stirrup Steve who now stands in the shadow of the court. I know that he loves Alta and that he would not look at me with a friendly feeling because he knows why I was banished from Chiquita. But you are not going to triumph over the men who are in the toils. Look here, Captain Jack. You are no more Count than I am. I know that they want you in another part of this country, that Uncle Sam's soldiers would cross a desert to find you and take you back in chains. You want the boy spy; you have your men out after him now. And why?"

There was no answer after this pause, but brother and sister were looking at each other with very little space between them.

"You shall not kill Eagle Ned. You shall not touch him through the court of Ragged Robin."

"And why not?" demanded Captain Jack.

Selina loosened her grip and fell back nearly across the room.

At that moment the door opened and a man appeared there.

"We found the girl in the mine. Dick was shot by some person there and the girl herself got away."

"Good! good!" cried Selina.

The nabob stood for a moment longer without speech, but all at once he demanded to be told the whole story. This was told and he, with Selina, listened to it with a great deal of interest.

"The boy's revolver did it," said Jack through his clinched teeth. "The boy is in the old mine. You must go back to it. I will lead you myself. The court can wait for we will have three prisoners to try instead of two."

When the Spider had gone back to his companions Captain Jack turned upon Selina and for a moment looked her in the eye.

"Keep your hand out of this game," he said sternly. "It is one for the balance of power in camp. If you interfere, back to Chiquita you go and that without ceremony!"

He shut the door in her face and did not hear

the words she sent after him with a look that seemed powerful enough to kill.

"He defies me," said Selina. "He dares me to interfere in this game of his. He will rule or ruin; he will send me back over the desert to Chiquita where they want me, but I will never go back. As to becoming the wife of the man to whom he has given me, I will see to that. He thinks he can dispose of me because I am his sister. Ha, ha, he has never learned to know Selina."

The tall figure of Captain Jack appeared on the Plaza to be seen at once by the whole camp.

Dick, who had been wounded in the mine, came forward with his bandaged arm, and growled out his eagerness to go back for vengeance.

"Where are the prisoners?" said Captain Jack. "They are at Phocion's shanty or were awhile ago."

"See that they are safe first—"

"But, captain, there is another thing I want to talk about. We made a new discovery."

"What is that?"

"There is a league against us."

The face of the nabob of Ragged Robin grew white, but only for a moment. A league against the Spiders of the camp? He could not believe that any one would be bold enough to face the order in its very web, and when Dick told him that a mutiny was one of the facts of the day he looked incredulous though he could not hold his color.

"Where are they and who are at the head of the mutiny?" cried The Count.

Dick was leaning toward his master and with lowered voice was talking earnestly when a shout was heard and both turned toward the saloon.

Black Burt in shirt sleeves stood on the porch of his establishment, and there was something startling in his look.

"There's the Old Harry to pay," cried Black Burt. "There is mutiny in camp. Carejo Phil is at the head of the conspiracy, and the bomb is liable to burst at any time."

In an instant the name of Carejo Phil was on many a lip, and hands moved swiftly to the belts of the border.

"Where is he? Where is the traitor?"

Captain Jack, handsomer than ever, was walking toward the man on the porch.

"Convene the court and try the prisoners at once!" he went on. "The faithful of Ragged Robin are not to be choked off by a lot of vipers. Send a band of men to the Merry Mixer and let them search every foot of it. The young spy is there as well as the girl who would not betray him to Dick and his men. I am still alcalde here. I am still the ruler of the destinies of the capital of the Black Mesa."

A loud cheer greeted these words, and the men of the camp began to gather round the man who had spoken.

A number surged toward the figure on the porch of the saloon, and Black Burt told them how a man, the weakest of the mutineers, had been made drunk by his vile stuff and how he had drawn from him the history of the uprising.

The men clamored to be led to the cabins of Carejo Phil, but the advice of Captain Jack held them back, and while the whole camp was in an uproar they were kept down by the coolness of the nabob.

"We can suppress this rebellion and throw the mutineers into court. There will be swift vengeance when it sits. I want them all. I want to see Eagle Ned among the victims, and until we have secured the boy lurking in the depths of the Merry Mixer, there will be no man killed."

Standing at one of the windows of the palace, a witness to all this, was Selina, a smile on her darkly beautiful face.

"Will I go back to Chiquita? I guess not," said she. "The storm is breaking over somebody else's head. There will be tough times before the sun sets or I am no judge of trouble."

She saw a band of men go toward the mine, she noticed another band walk toward Phocion's shanty, and eagerly she watched both.

All at once a door opened on the Plaza and the figure of Carejo Phil, the head of the mutineers, appeared. Captain Jack the chief of the Camp Spiders saw it, but he did not speak.

In another instant Carejo Phil vanished and the nabob smiled.

"They are all there," he said to himself. "The conspirators are cooped up in Carejo's shanty and are waiting for the signal."

Let us follow the men who went back to the heart of the Merry Mixer.

They were led by the same person who had



led them on the first occasion. He was eager to find the person who had winged him. He wanted to recapture Alta, who had given them the slip and when he found himself in the old mine, he stopped, and gave his followers their orders.

They kept on into the mine looking everywhere for the fugitives, and every now and then listening in the corridors for footfalls. They were armed for an emergency, and all had promised that they would not come up out of the bonanza without their prisoners.

Crawling along ledges in the dark, threading trails that seemed to have no ending, feeling their way up one corridor and down another, the toughs of Ragged Robin, on hunt of Eagle Ned and Alta, pursued their dangerous way.

They knew what depended on their bravery and caution. They felt that their stay in camp depended on their success in the mine, and all believed that if they failed to find those for whom they hunted, the reign of the Spiders would close in darkness and ruin.

"Hark, I heard some one then," whispered the leader of the band, stopping while those behind came up.

All heard voices, all heard sounds which seemed to tell them that they were near the end of the hunt.

In the darkness of the corridor they stood with their hands on their weapons and in this position listened for a repetition of the sounds.

"They are coming this way. Divide and hug the walls," said Dick.

The men did so. They stood against the stone walls of the passage and seemed to hold their breath.

Down the subterranean way came footfalls which they could not mistake.

Nearer and nearer.

Some one was walking into the Spiders' trap. All at once half a dozen hands shot forward and a cry was heard.

"We've got 'em!" shouted Captain Dick.

"We've found the tenants of the mine."

"Strike a light," said another voice.

In a moment the flame of a lucifer was rising in the corridor, and when the men saw by it their eyes sent forth sparks of delight, for both Eagle Ned and Alta stood in the grip of their enemies!

"It was a trap you warn't looking for, eh?" sneered Dick.

"It's all one," answered the boy spy. "We were on our way up to the light, and to the tribunal of the camp."

"To the tribunal?"

"Yes. I am ready, ay, eager to meet the court of the Black Mesa. I want to stand face to face with Captain Jack at its bar."

The men looked in astonishment at one another, but the very coolness of the boy gave emphasis to his words.

"Come, Captain Dick, Alta and I want to go up out of this underground pit."

The wounded tough glared at Eagle Ned, and then looked at his own bandaged arm.

"Your work, isn't it?" he said.

"Yes, my work," smiled the young spy. "I could have sent the bullet through your head just as easily, but I thought I would give you a chance to repent."

The others laughed at their leader's expense, but the face of Captain Dick grew dark and he shut his teeth hard in reply.

#### CHAPTER XVII.

##### IN THE LAST WEB.

CLOSELY guarded by those into whose hands they had fallen, Eagle Ned and Alta went up out of the mine, and the sunlight fell upon them still in the hands of the Camp Spiders.

"Heavens, they have caught the boy and Alta!" cried Selina who saw the procession as it came out of the bonanza and made its way toward the Plaza, on one side of which stood the saloon run by Black Burt. "They must have captured the pair without a struggle. I wonder if Captain Dick did not exhibit some prowess in the mine. Now, what will The Count do?"

Captain Jack had gone back to the palace, and at that very moment was the sole occupant of one of the rooms, not knowing that Ned and Alta had been captured.

The nabob was leaning over some documents which he had spread before him, and he was looking carefully at each one as he separated it from the others.

The figure of his sister went up the stairs and did not disturb him.

All at once the door opened, and the face of Captain Dick appeared.

"We have both of them," said the tough.

"Who? Eagle Ned and the girl?"

Dick bowed, and at a look from the man with the papers he came forward and stood at the table.

Captain Jack pulled at his mustache a moment and then pushed the papers from him.

"Dick, do you recollect the man who came to Ragged Robin last May? The man who said to you that he heard we had a seraph in camp? And you came and told me that the man was there?"

"I recollect him very distinctly, captain," was the answer. "What about him?"

The nabob of the camp seemed to look beyond Dick.

"That man had a history," he said. "How much time have you, Dick?"

"All you want me to have."

Captain Dick, touching the table, folded his arms and waited for the chief of the Camp Spiders to proceed.

"Look here, Dick. That man was looking for a lost child, a girl who he said was taken from him years ago. He talked a good deal like one demented, and sometimes he would break down and weep. It was distressing to hear his story. These papers before me were found on the man's body after he died."

"Did he die?" asked Dick, starting some.

"He died. These papers, I say, were found on his body. They tell the story of his life, and it is a singular one. He had a wife and two children, but when he lost the daughter he registered a vow that he would not return home until he had found her. It proved a fruitless chase; he died in Ragged Robin."

"I never heard of that," said Dick.

"Perhaps not."

There was a sinister smile at the corners of the man's mouth, and he was looking at Captain Jack as he had never watched him before.

"Eagle Ned, who disappeared and came back disguised as Doodles, the half-breed Comanche boy, knows something about the death of that man," the nabob went on. "The boy spy came hither on hunt of a sister who was lost years ago; he, like the man before him, registered a vow that he would not give up the hunt until success crowned his efforts; but you have captured him in the heart of the mine, and he is now in the grip of the court."

"It can hold him till doomsday, captain."

"I know that. It can hold him despite the mutineers headed by Carejo Phil. I want the boy brought before me."

"To this house?"

"Yes. I want Eagle Ned under the roof where he played spy with so much cunning. Do you think you could get him away without exciting much suspicion?"

"It shall be done."

"Do it at once, if possible, but don't let any one follow with the intention of rescuing him."

Captain Dick departed and the nabob was once more alone.

"I want to see the boy alone," he said to himself. "I want to look him in the eye and hear what he knows. Though young, he is dangerous. Selina knows this and she is nearly always right."

Meantime Alta had been permitted to return to her little home under pledge that when wanted she would come forth and face the tribunal of Ragged Robin, but Eagle Ned had been kept in custody and was one of the occupants of Black Burt's place with more than forty men looking him in the face.

There was no sign of fear on the calm face of the boy prisoner.

He stood near the counter where the glasses kept up an ominous clinking and where the toughs of the camp, all his mortal enemies, imbibed the villainous liquor which Black Burt sold.

He saw the form of Captain Dick come back. He had missed the man, but did not know what had become of him, though he felt that he had carried a report of some kind to his master.

Dick, eager to carry out the orders he had received, sidled along the counter and at the first opportunity touched Eagle Ned on the arm and then drew him toward him.

The boy resented the touch with an indignant flash and Dick grinned.

"What is it?" demanded Ned.

"I want you. Ask no questions and it will be safer."

There was a slight movement on the part of the mountain wolves as Eagle Ned was drawn across the threshold of the den as if they feared that Dick had turned rescuer, but the hand of the desperado checked them.

"The boy will be brought back presently," he said. "The Count wants to see him."

Dick was followed from the den and escorted almost to the door of the palace.

When Ned and his guard had vanished beyond the door the mob drew off and cast sullen looks toward the shanty where the mutineers were supposed to be concealed.

"Let's raid them now an throttle the whole lot!" said one of the crowd.

"Let's crush the rebellion before it can strike, and, with the hull lot in the web, there will be a wholesale wearing of the mark of the Camp Spiders."

These suggestions carried weight with them. The men had been to Black Burt's counter just often enough to fire them with a desire to crush out "the rebellion," and before long they were moving sullenly toward the suspected shanty.

Not far off, the occupants of Phocion's cabin, stood the red-beard and Stirrup Steve.

They saw the movement and guessed what it meant.

Presently they saw the figure of Alta run across the Square and in a moment the girl was at the door.

"They have taken Eagle Ned to the palace!" cried the girl as Stirrup Steve opened the portal. "They will settle accounts with him there. But look yonder! The mob is moving down upon Carejo Phil and his rebels."

"It is the beginning of the end," said Stirrup Steve.

But all at once, as if moved by some unaccountable impulse, the bronzed men moving toward the cabin turned back and went the other way.

When they had nearly crossed the Plaza, the door of Carejo Phil's shanty opened and the figure of that worthy came out. He was followed by twenty men, the entire number of the mutineers.

For a moment the two factions glared at one another like rival packs of wolves, but there was no hot work.

Captain Dick's Spiders went on toward Black Burt's, and an hour of quiet passed.

"What has happened in that house?" said Alta, ill at ease as she printed toward the nabob's palace, while she looked up into the faces of Steve and Phocion.

"It is too quiet there not to mean something," said Phocion.

"It means that another trap has closed on Eagle Ned."

No one came out of the palace, no one entered it, and the sun beating upon it, sunk lower and lower, and still the mystery was not solved.

"I am going to see," suddenly cried Alta. "I can't stand this any longer."

"No, let me go," put in Stirrup Steve, whereupon the sturdy Phocion caught his arm.

"I am the one to go. I am only Phocion, with nothing particular to live for. I will go."

The tall form of the red-beard was seen to cross the Square and approach the palace.

His step did not falter.

There was a slight demonstration as he advanced, by the men who watched him from the porch of Black Burt's place, but they did not interrupt his march.

The old miner did not knock at the front door, but caught the knob, gave it a wrench and entered. He was in the house of the nabob, the headquarters of the Camp Spiders.

He heard no noise, but this did not deter him. He saw ahead the door, which stood half-ajar, and went forward.

In another moment he had entered a room, in the middle of which, the tenant of a chair, with his head thrown back and a rope round his neck, appeared Eagle Ned, the boy spy and ferret.

Phocion sprang forward with a cry, but as he touched the boy he was startled by a voice, and the next moment he stood face to face with Captain Jack.

"Drop that rope!" commanded the nabob. "The young spy is paying the penalty for spying. He is in the web of the Camp Spiders, and so are you!"

Phocion seemed to increase in stature. He threw up his hands as he sprang toward the man in the doorway; there was a flash and report, and the figure of the red-beard reeled against the wall and fell to the floor.

#### CHAPTER XVIII.

##### THE END OF THE GAME.

THE rule of Jack Jargo was such that he was held in awe even by those who belonged to the Camp Spiders.

They dared not question him in anything and when they heard the shot in the palace they did not go to see what had followed it. They believed that ere long Captain Jack himself would come out and tell them all, but when



the shadows grew long without the figure of the nabob falling across the Plaza, all wondered what had happened.

By and by Selina came out.

The face of the nabob's sister was pale and her eyes had an unnatural light.

She came toward the place where the Camp Spiders were congregated, and as she entered the den all surged toward her and waited with bated breath for her to speak.

"Men of Ragged Robin, I am your captain's sister no longer," she began. "I am not going back to Chiquita, neither will I become the wife of Toby," and here she turned and fixed her eyes on the man who bore this name.

Toby shut his hands hard and would have moved forward if a wave of Selina's hand had not detained him.

"Stand where you are," she said. "Captain Jack is in the saddle by this time. He has a rider at his heels for Eagle Ned, who was once Doodles, has been rescued by Phocion, though Phocion carries along his skull the mark of the Spider's bullet."

The men who heard Selina looked at each other, but did not speak.

"It is a strange story which you ought to hear," she went on. "You ought to know that Eagle Ned is on the trail of vengeance, that he discovered in the Devil's Tunnel the body of a man who came to Ragged Robin nearly a year ago in search of a stolen daughter; that the boy, suspecting who had taken that man's life, played spy, a part of the time in the palace as a half-breed boy. He neglected no opportunity to find out something. He tracked Captain Jack, and I was sometimes under his watchful eye."

"When he thought the time had arrived for the transformation, he once more became Eagle Ned, the *protege* of Phocion. He took refuge in the Merry Mixer Mine, but with Alta, the girl, was discovered and captured by Dick and his men. He was afterward taken to the palace, there to face Captain Jack who forced him into a chair and left him for dead in the web of the Spiders. But Phocion came and found him there; he went toward Captain Jack when he saw him in the doorway, but a bullet sent him to the wall, not dead, but bleeding. That shot sent Captain Jack adrift. Though he was still nabob of Ragged Robin, he was forced to fly, for I came between him and further rule in the Black Mesa."

"You, woman?" cried Toby. "Why, you are his own sister and you are wanted in Chiquita. Men, that woman is an outlaw despite her sex. There is a reward for her in Chiquita and—"

"Hear me through!" interrupted Selina, her tiger eyes flashing their baleful light on Toby. "I am not his sister, though I have claimed that relationship to him all these years. Captain Jack knew that I was aware of the fact that no blood unites us. I followed his fortunes because he knew a secret which would destroy my happiness if I were sent back to Chiquita, where once I killed an officer who insulted me. I have said that the boy, Eagle Ned, is after Captain Jack. Why? He knows by whose hands the man who now sleeps in the Devil's Tunnel was helped out of the world. He knows who that man was, and putting this and that together, he had a desire to avenge his death. Master Toby, do you know who your victim was?"

Selina turned full upon Toby, and the man's cheeks blanched.

"Man, you helped Captain Jack with that job. You knew all the time that the old tunnel was inhabited; your hands walled it up after Eagle Ned had been enticed into it by the nabob of Ragged Robin; you opened it and went in to look for the boy spy, but found him not. You found your victim there, and for a moment you thought him alive. The necklace which the child-hunter had in his possession the night he landed in this camp came to me, but it has been an accursed keepsake, because it seemed to be stained with blood."

Toby made a movement toward the door, but Selina followed him, covering him with her hand.

"Will you take me back to Chiquita?" she laughed. "Will you carry me across the desert, and present me to the authorities because I refuse to become your wife? Look here, Toby. Don't be a coward."

But Toby did not stop.

Clinching his hands, he continued to the door where he paused for a moment and then caught Selina's eye.

"Your time will come," he cried. "You will go back to Chiquita when you least expect it. You will yet feel the vengeance of the halter."

The laugh of the woman ringing in his ears was the last sound he heard as he left the den,

and when he was on the Plaza he shut his hands and was heard to say:

"Beaten! A thousand curses on the head of that woman!"

Meantime Selina had turned to the men in the saloon.

"You are the Spiders of Ragged Robin," she went on. "If you wish you can follow the fortunes of your master who has both Phocion and Eagle Ned at his heels. Lazarus and Red Mart, who were killed after dark, died because they were survivors of the Vigilantes who long ago, and in another camp, wiped out a band of Camp Spiders whose leader was the man who is now a fugitive from justice. But why tell you this? You know why these two men were killed and some of you know why Captain Jack wanted Stirrup Steve and Phocion out of the way. Alta will learn in time that her father has a grave nearer her than she thinks. The wail of Ragged Robin shall receive from me the jewels which rightfully belong to her. She—"

Selina was interrupted by the looks which told her that some one had entered the den and the next moment she was looking at Alta herself.

The beautiful girl, escorted by Stirrup Steve, was coming forward with her eyes fastened on the woman from Chiquita, and when she stopped they were close together.

"That is the child of the man who sleeps in the tunnel," continued Selina. "Here are the necklace jewels which belonged to her when a babe. I thought I would wear them myself, but what am I but an outlawed creature upon whose head a price has been set?"

Alta saw a string of pearls glistening in Selina's hands and, changing color, she seemed to reel forward, and when she paused she threw her hands to her head and cried out:

"Heavens! what a strange tale is this? If it is true, then I am Eagle Ned's sister."

She sunk to the floor at Selina's feet, but the hands of Stirrup Steve lifted her and placed the jewels about her neck.

"She has guessed her identity to the letter," said Selina, meeting the gaze of the young man. "There are papers which confirm my words."

A minute later Selina was seen crossing the Square and the palace, that house of mystery, opened its door to her.

Far away from Ragged Robin where we have witnessed the startling events detailed in the foregoing chapters, a man was riding at break-neck speed toward a mountain camp which consisted of a few shanties.

It was nightfall and the rising moon over the naked peaks on his left showed him the trails which his steed followed without difficulty.

A week had passed since the last scene at Ragged Robin.

The rider at last dismounted and entered a well-lighted place in the center of the camp.

Everybody looked at him, at his slashed boots, his keen black eyes and smoothly shaven face.

Advancing to the counter which ran along one end of the saloon, he leaned against it and turned to the curious crowd which had surged forward full of suppressed excitement.

"You don't know me," he said, with a grim smile. "Do I look like any person you have ever seen?"

At that moment two persons entered the den, and one, a boy, covered the man at the bar.

"Let me answer him," said the youth. "He not only looks like Captain Jack, the so-called Count of Ragged Robin, but he is that worthy. Phocion and I have tracked him mile after mile ever since his flight. He is the chief of the Spiders of Eagle Buttes and the head of the web of Ragged Robin. He is the man who left Joshua Meeks, my father, in the heart of the Devil's Tunnel; he is the Spider that sucked the blood of Lazarus and Red Mart. Shall we have him, men of Crescent City?"

The answer was enough. The men fell upon the tall figure at the bar and before the cool hand could follow the dictates of as cool a head, the web had been broken forever and the king Spider was in the toils.

This time another court held a session in Ragged Robin and Phocion was the judge thereof.

We need not describe the scenes that followed; but we will say that the dead were avenged, that the mutineers of the camp saw that none but the really guilty suffered, and that Phocion took the place of the outlaw alcalde.

As for Eagle Ned, the boy spy, he was happy because the past was a mystery no longer, for he had found the lost sister, and when the proper time came he gave her away to Stirrup Steve and the wedding was for months the talk of the mountain camps.

The Spiders' web was forever broken and

Ragged Robin, since a flourishing city, no longer feared the deadly sting.

Selina disappeared soon after the triumph of justice which she had helped along, and from that day was lost sight of by those who had known her. It is certain she did not return to Chiquita, and Eagle Ned who, as Doodles, had slept under her uplifted dagger, was not anxious to have her black eyes in his path.

The boy spy became the owner of rich mines where he had fought the Camp Spiders, and lives to-day with Alta and Stirrup Steve.

THE END.

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